

Dynamite Hemorrhage

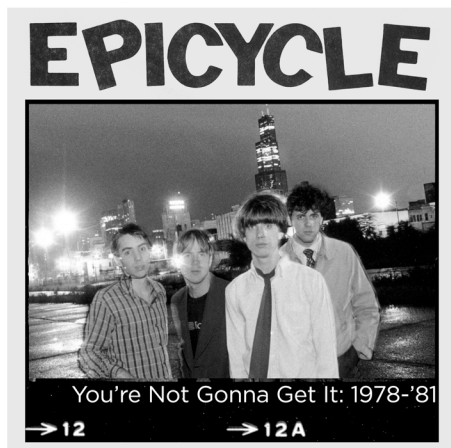
ISSUE #1

The Flesh Eaters

Chris D. on '77-'80 punk,
Slash magazine,
Upsetter Records
& more

Sally Skull • Household
Bona Dish • Sex Tide
reviews • *more*

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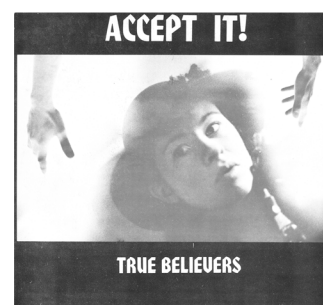
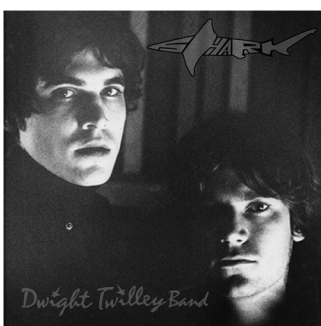


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Dynamite Hemorrhage #1.

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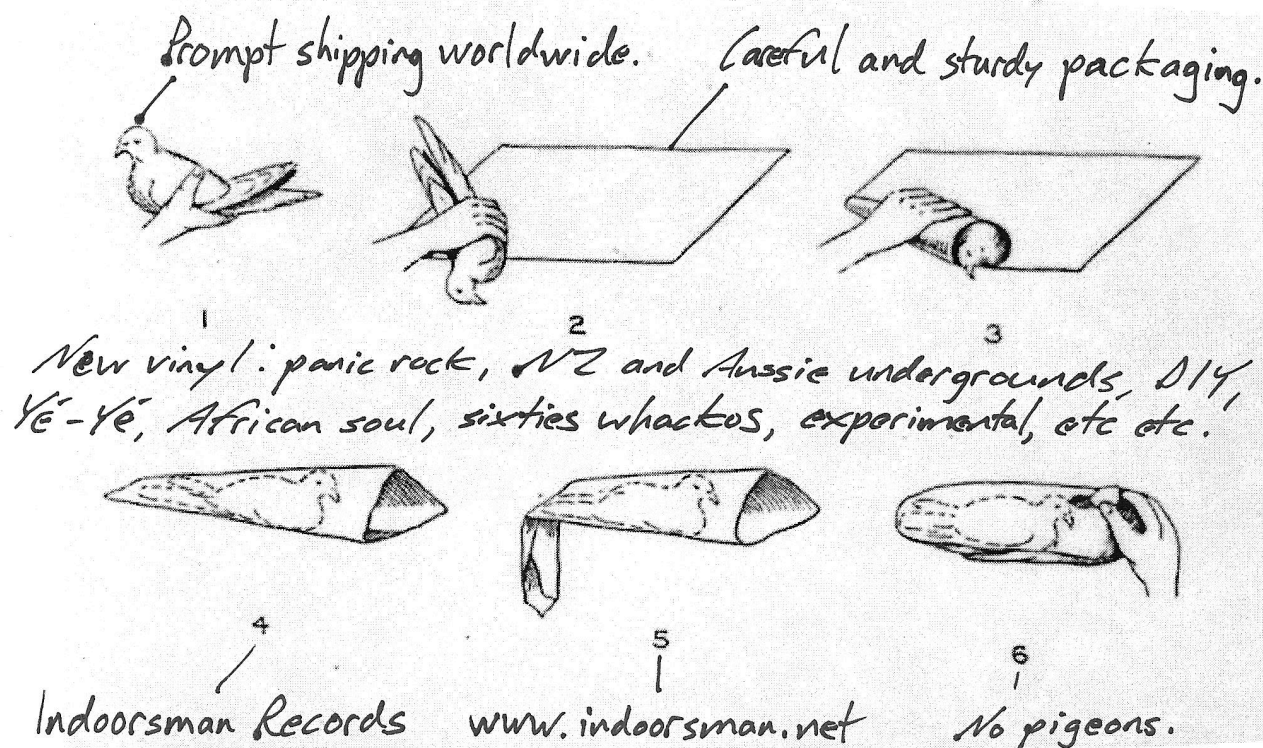
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REVIEW POLICY: Please don't send physical product. We'd rather not burden struggling labels by not reviewing your wares. That said, mp3 submissions, .zip files & the like are gladly accepted at dynamiteh@outlook.com

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SALLY SKULL

Now It Can Be Told. The Dynamite Hemorrhage Interview



I have Talya Cooper of **Household** to thank for turning me onto Sally Skull, though, sadly, she and I have yet to officially break bread together in celebration. She made a digital “mixtape” on 8Tracks.com for Girl Gang ‘Zine of female-fronted obscurities that she held dear to heart, and Sally Skull’s 1997 track “The Running Kind” was part of said collection. My jaw hit the goddamn floor when I heard it. It’s a low-fidelity, lost-to-time monster of a par with Mike Rep & the Quotas’ “Mama Was a Schitzo, Daddy Was a Vegetable Man” or The Bo-Weevils’ “That Girl”, and I couldn’t believe every collector scum heathen and her brother weren’t clamoring for this record on want lists worldwide. So that full credit is given across the board – Dynamite Hemorrhage contributing editor Erika Elizabeth then digitized her 45rpm copy of this record for me so I could “own” it, at which point I stopped being such a freeloading chump and went out onto the www and bought physical copies of their records myself.

“Fractious”, that second 4-song EP from the Edinburgh, Scotland trio, is a wild, lo-fi garage masterpiece, yet unlike the mistake-prone “accidental” unearthings that are hallmarks of studio piss-takes that transmute into lost classics, Sally Skull (1994-1998) were very calculated and methodical in what they were creating. They saw themselves in a league with the garage bands of their day (Wild Billy Childish and his many projects; the Scottish bands with whom they played), as well as with the *to-thine-own-self-be-true* ethos of the burgeoning collection of riot grrl bands, many of whom were also raising an unholy racket across the UK at the time. They were just better.

Their earlier EP “The Tativity Tracks” from 1995 is in a league with its antecedent but remind me more of a bouncy, garage punk-influenced Kleenex, never mind the Liliput. Tracks like “Bone Monster” have odd bits of analog keyboard pasted on as well, something that popped up from time to time in Sally Skull’s catalog and kept their songs and approach somewhat unpredictable. As they gigged around the UK – and as you’ll read, in France – the trio must have felt a part of the larger community of all-female or female-dominated bands making inroads throughout the underground that decade, and yet it’s clear to me that their material stands so far ahead of their peers, charting or unknown, that their complete obscurity is a crime that must be addressed and rectified at once.

After a somewhat herculean effort to track them down, I sat down for a telephone discussion with guitarist and singer Clare Scrivener. Bass player and singer Saskia Holling added key insights on via email, and both provided me (and by extension, *you*) with an array of photos and flyers that helps us to reconstruct the Sally Skull mythos. It’s my sincere hope that this piece is only the first salvo that reintroduces the band to the global public.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Jay
Sally Skull: Clare Scrivener (guitar/vocals)
 Saskia Holling (bass/vocals)

Dynamite Hemorrhage: *When Sally Skull formed in 1994, had the three of you played in other groups before that?*

Clare Scrivener: Yes, we all had, actually. For my part, I played rhythm guitar in a 60s garage band called **The Pterodaktyls**, with a K. There was quite a 60s garage scene in Edinburgh, sort of mid- to late 80s and onwards. I mostly stood at the back playing bar chords, and didn’t do a whole lot in that. Basically the original singer had left and their rhythm guitarist became the singer, and they drafted me.

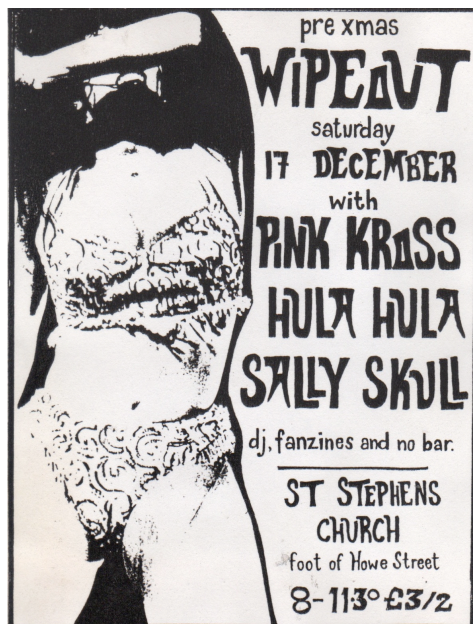
Saskia was in a band called **Fudd**, which is quite amusing if you’re from Scotland – she can tell you all about that. Phil was in a few bands, actually – she was in a band called **We Free Kings**, and she was playing guitar in a band called **Gila Monster**. She really just wanted to play the drums. It’s kind of the reverse of that joke, “*What do you call someone who hangs around musicians? A drummer.*” She was a proper musician among all the DIY punk types.

Saskia Holling: Hmmm what can I say about Fudd... there was 4 of us who had never played in a band before and 3 of us hadn’t even touched an instrument so it was very basic. I actually fronted – sang and played guitar (badly). We had a lot of energy and enthusiasm though! We were based in Glasgow and I think the most positive thing that came out of the band was that Maureen who was later in LungLeg came to see us at the original 13th Note and she later told me that she thought “*Well if they can do it*”. P.S. - Fudd is the Scottish word for Cunt!

DH: *That was around the time that Lindsay Hutton was putting out “Next Big Thing” as a magazine, right?*

Clare: Yes, that was coming out at that time, yeah.

DH: *What little I know about Scottish garage punk and garage pop of the 80s – pretty much all I know – was from that magazine.*



Clare: Oh, all right, I don't know if you ever heard of The Thanes or the Green Telescope...

DH: *Oh, Green Telescope I have...*

Clare: Lenny from the Green Telescope was kind of the godfather of the 80s garage scene in Edinburgh. The thing about our band is we were the only band he *wasn't* in – he was pretty much in all the bands.

DH: *What sort of music were you personally weaned on, and how did your taste veer into this sort of loud, garagey rock and roll?*

Clare: In my house growing up, my dad was really into rock music, so it was always going on, but he did like Dire Straits and stuff, which I didn't really like. Basically, I was a John Peel listener, when I got a bit older, and I bought the NME. For people my age, it's a very common story. I followed the links from things like Siouxsie and the Banshees; they were in the charts all the time and on "Top of the Pops"; I followed that direct to more obscure things. I was really crazy about Joy Division. I think I listened to them and nothing else for about 3 months, which was probably not very healthy. I moved to Edinburgh to go to university and that's when I met up with the more garage punk kind of thing, all the "Pebbles" compilations and that kind of stuff. I really, really liked it, and liked the fact that they were these obscure bands that just did a couple of cool things and disappeared.

DH: *Well that sounds familiar, doesn't it?*

Clare: Yeah! I was sort of hanging around with people who were into that sort of scene but I was still keen on Pixies and that kind of thing as well.

DH: *Did you have an initial vision for Sally Skull when you started, and in tandem with that, how does the legend of your husband-murdering Texas namesake figure into the band's whole aesthetic?*

Clare: The "husband-murdering" wasn't front and center or anything like that. Somebody had a book of "cowgirls of the old west", and that was the first time we'd heard of Sally Skull. We were thinking of names for the band. I think our vision, really, was – we weren't a riot grrl band, but there was a lot of that going on at the time. I went to see a band called the **Voodoo Queens** and bumped into Saskia, and we were like, "let's put a band together". I wanted to do something that was a bit more meaty rather than just playing in the background, and Saskia wanted to put a band together as well.

With the name, as an all-female band, we didn't want a name that was too much all about that, but somebody suggested this Sally Skull and we really liked it. It was just a name, a cool name. I quite like that Sally's such a girly name and that Skull is more....but our first rehearsals, we didn't do any covers to start off with. I just did bar chords, Phil was learning to play the drums, and Saskia was just getting her bass style together. We didn't bother to do covers, we just moved things along; our songs were mostly about Sally Skull, just to get started. We'd do these long sorts of....

DH: *...jams about Sally Skull?*

Clare: Yeah, it sounds sort of strange. We were trying to get to know each other as well, though I'd met Phil before.

DH: *Once you got rolling, what was a typical gig of yours like in terms of attendance and reaction from the crowd, and how did that change over time?*

Clare: Attendance was pretty good, I think. We used to play on multi-band bills a lot, so you couldn't really say "they're all here for us", but they were a lot of all-female or female-fronted bands around at the time, and we quite often got put on the same bills. There would be **Lung Leg**, and **Hello Skinny** and **Pink Kross**, and **Golden Starlet** from Newcastle. We *did* play in Manchester to three people, but that was a last-minute gig, and unlike nowadays it's quite hard to tell people last minute that you're playing.

DH: *Is that as far south as you ever went, in terms of playing?*

Clare: No, we played in Brighton, and in London, in Leeds, Newcastle, Middlesbrough and Manchester. We went on a few tours with other people, kind of mini-tours. We did also play in France, but that was kind of a strange gig. We got quite a good reaction in general, I think.

DH: *The bands you mention that you played with – that was such a peak time for all-female, garagey, riot grrl scene. A lot of that stuff passed me by at the time, and I knew the American bands that were doing it, but I kind of feel that the bands in the UK were doing it in a very different way, in a more classically "garage" way. I just never heard it.*

Clare: A lot of these bands weren't London bands, which in the UK means it's hard to get noticed. We were kind of out on the edges as far as the mainstream. We did get played on John Peel, and I was very very happy. They also played one of our tracks on the BBC World Service, which was a program that was received by the entire world. I thought that was quite good.

DH: *Did you play with Lung Leg a lot at the time?*

Clare: We did play with them a lot, it was quite a common lineup, really.

DH: *Were there other bands that you considered contemporaries at the time, whether they were in Scotland or the UK or anywhere else in the world?*

Clare: The people we played with, definitely, but I don't think we felt that we were like them, necessarily. Lung Leg were quite a bit younger than us; I mean not hugely, but you know, when you're in your twenties and you're 25 and someone else is like, 21, you think that's a huge difference. We were on the same bills, and Vesuvius were putting out our stuff.

DH: *And they were also based in Edinburgh?*

Clare: They were based in Glasgow. Pink Kross were Glasgow as well, Hello Skinny were in Glasgow, so we used to play quite a lot in Glasgow to play with all of them.

DH: *What sort of crazy gig stories do you have? I'll take stories of playing to nobody, having to play weddings, whatever.*

Clare: The strange gig in France I alluded to earlier – we went on tour with Gila Monster, and a friend of theirs had gotten us a gig at a “Scottish music festival” in Brittany. We weren’t the kind of Scottish music they were expecting, I don’t think.

DH: *They were thinking bagpipes, maybe?*

Clare: Yeah, probably bagpipes would have gone over better. We did have a bagpipe on stage at one point. We used to do a thing where we’d get a sort of “guest” on or something like that, and one of the members of Gila Monster played the Bulgarian bagpipes. They decided they weren’t going to pay us. We’d come quite a long way in a van that didn’t have a working fuel gauge, so we kept running out of petrol, and had to do some strange calculations in order to not do that. You could see the road out of the floor of the van. We’d borrowed it from another Edinburgh band. It was a bit crazy. They decided that we were to take our payment in *cheese*. There was quite a lot of cheese backstage.

DH: *Hey, at least it was France, right?*

Clare: Yeah, there was loads of really great stuff! So we took some cheese, but unfortunately we had to give it back. They were not too pleased that we had taken whole cheeses. That was all a bit strange.

Our other crazy gig story was at the Cas Rock in Edinburgh, a place where a lot of people have played. There was one guy who just kept shouting, “*You’re crap, you’re shit*” and things like that. I’m afraid I lost it, and just went and punched him. I’m a bit ashamed of it.

Saskia: I really don’t think Clare needs to be ashamed – the guy was also shouting “Shampoo” at us – they were a really awful pap sorry pop band at the time but who just happened to be female too. He deserved some agro back and that’s what he got – you could hear the whole venue cheering as he was escorted from the place.

DH: *Did you actually coldcock him and knock him out?*

Clare: No! Sally Skull may be a tough name, but that’s not really our sort of thing.

DH: *Oh, you had to issue disclaimers afterward for your behavior?*

Clare: Lots of people definitely heard about it, and we had to tell them, “*We’re really not like that at all*”. I really was angry. He would not have done that had we not been an all-female band. It was a bit crazy. Everyone was just really surprised, I think – especially him.

We went on tour with **Gila Monster** that time, and as well as



Clare - live at The Tap, Edinburgh

playing that strange gig in France, we played in London; we also supported **The Raincoats** at The Venue in Edinburgh. We went on tour with **The Wildebeests**, and we went on tour with **Milky Wimpshake**, who were a Slampt band, so that was later on. We got about quite a bit.

DH: *I heard your second record first, but the first record reminds me of a jittery, more garage-y sort of Kleenex. What were your chief influences as a band as that record was getting made, and did you capture what you were hoping for?*

Clare: I think so. I suppose it does look like there’s a difference between the two, but some of it was the recording. It was much more of a lo-fi, garagey sound for the second EP, and we did the first one in a studio. We did have a lot of different style of songs, really. It was just depending on which ones were picked. “You Better Go” from the second EP – we were playing that at gigs at the time we were recording the first EP.

DH: *You curated them well, to give a real cohesive feel to both of them.*

Clare: The obvious difference is that it’s different drummers on the two records. Phil’s drumming style – she was quite interested in doing some unusual things, off-kilter type stuff. We could have chosen “You Better Go” for



First gig - Demarco's European Art Foundation, Edinburgh - May 8th, 1994

that EP, but we didn't. The main difference was the drummers. As a band, all three of us were equally important, I think. It wasn't like me or Saskia, and then people standing behind us. Katrina (second EP drummer) is more of a tubthumper. It made things go in a slightly different direction.

Saskia: Yes I think it was a lot to do with all of the above but also that we became more confident with our playing and also in terms of the kind of sound that we wanted to create.

DH: *What sort of attention did the first record get?*

Clare: Oh, we got a really horrible review in the Melody Maker. I wasn't really happy about that. I don't know, I don't have a copy of it or anything, but they said it was a sort of "corporate", bandwagon-jumping thing, which I was completely flabbergasted by. I don't know what the story was, really.

DH: *"Corporate" is probably the last word I'd assign to that record.*

Clare: That's what I would have thought as well. The review started, "Oh, I know who Sally Skull are" and I was thinking, "What? How do you know who Sally Skull are", so I think it was people saying, oh, you must review this, you must think it's really good – and he thought, well no, actually I won't. Which is fair, but I thought it was weird, a strange response. I did actually phone up and said "I want to talk to...", but he wasn't one of the on-staff people. It's probably just as well. I probably would have said something stupid.

DH: *You might have punched him if you'd seen him. So much of the English music press at that time seemed like it was deliberately provocative. That was one of the things that was appealing to me when I was 15 years*

old, just how upset they could get about certain records, and over-the-top excited about other records.

Clare: Yeah, it was definitely a part of the way things were. It was all about those papers, and John Peel, and for getting coverage. There were things that they were either very down about, or just didn't cover that were really good, so things would get missed out on. People would have to find out about them in different ways.

DH: *I don't know if chronologically this is the right place to ask, but you had a track ("Raven") on the Vesuvius Records compilation "In Spelunca". Did that come out after the first record?*

Clare: That was before. That was their first record. We hadn't been going that long, actually. That was recorded in someone's living room.

DH: *Who ran Vesuvius, and how did they get in touch with you?*

Clare: It was Pat who was running Vesuvius. He knew Saskia and just got in touch and asked us to be on it.

Saskia: –Pat and Brian (can't remember surnames) – they were based in Glasgow and I had known them for a quite a while before they set up a label. Pat was in a band called Melody Dog and was a part of the Glasgow 'Pastels' scene.

DH: *Your second record came out a bit after that, in 1996. It's much more raw, very lo-fi/DIY garage punk record, and it's what I heard for the first time a year or two ago and blew me away.*

Clare: We were changing a bit over time, but "Running Kind"

and “You Better Go” were part of our set at the time we were putting out the first one. It didn’t feel that different to us at the time, not really. We recorded it at Russell Wilkins’ from The Wildebeests, he had a studio set up which was basically at his house. Do you know Toe Rag Studios in London? He supplied them with lots of their kits and things like that.

DH: You mentioned that you changed drummers between the two records; did Phil go back to playing music somewhere else?

Clare: Yes, she did. They’re all still playing music at this point, except for me. I’m the band’s underachiever. They’ve all basically got a story to tell.

DH: Slampt, who released your second single, was a label with a lot of notoriety in its own time. What did you see as some unifying themes of that label at the time, and where did Sally Skull fit in?

Clare: Basically, they just came to us and said they’d like to put out something by Sally Skull, and that was pretty much it. We played down in Newcastle. Although the Slampt people were notorious in a way for having a “punk attitude” or whatever, they were really great, enthusiastic people. Really fun to hang out with as well. In a way, I was slightly surprised they asked us, but we sent them a tape of what we’d recorded and let them pick the songs they wanted to put out.

DH: In the liner notes of your second single, it mentions that Hilary from the Delmonas plays, but I’m not clear what she does there.

Clare: She’s doing extra backing vocals on “The Running Kind” and “You Better Go”.

Saskia –Hilary and I had and have a husband (Russ Wilkins) in common! I was nothing to do with their split and it’s all very amicable. She lived near us at the time we were doing this recording and it seemed daft not to ask her as she has such a great voice and she added a bit of ‘oomph’ to these tracks – good to have that wall of vocal sound.

DH: My initial research on the band turned up some matches with the words “Sally Skull” and “riot grrl”. I’m not hearing any overt connections in the music or lyrics. What were your thoughts on the movement at the time – and now?

Clare: The reasons that we would associate with “riot grrl”, apart from being an all-female band, is that Saskia used to write a fanzine, and that kind of associated us with the riot grrl scene. Saskia used to also put on quite a lot of gigs as well, some political., fundraising things. We weren’t overtly riot grrl with political lyrics or anything like that, but we were fellow travelers, I suppose.

Right: Inserts from never-released Sally Skull retrospective CD “Skullduggery”



Saskia: Yes I think I was probably the one responsible for the Riot Grrrl connections due to the fanzine (Heavy Flow) and gigs that I used to organize (can't recall the exact name of the charity but it was to help fund groups who were working with women in Bosnia). I'm always happy to be recognized as a feminist and as such I never actively stopped anyone associating me with the term Riot Grrrl. It just seemed a fashionable or media friendly term for young feminists at that time and anything that gets more young women interested in being more vocal / active is OK with me.

DH: *It seems like it's almost a chronological thing, since that was exploding in '92 or '93, and if Saskia was putting out fanzines and you were an all-female, loud and garage band, it's like, "Oh, that's a riot grrl band".*

Clare: Yeah; then again, being in an all-female band, we found it quite different. It was a different kind of atmosphere, I think. The way we worked together was different (than in our previous bands). These days, you can go to see a night of bands, and there are no women on the stage at all, which is a shame. It was fun at the time that there were so many female bands around, and lots of people doing stuff.

Saskia: It is kind of depressing that these days I can play at various nights / festivals and be the only female on stage throughout the gig. Or even worse I'm the only woman on stage who keeps her clothes on ... the genre I play in these days is quite traditional rock n'roll but still, come on, let's see some more females making a noise out there.

Not so in Japan by the way where we played with some fantastic bands full of women! Girls GoYle, the Stompin' Riff Raffs - a very exciting scene over there.

DH: *Do you think these things kind of come in peaks and valleys, where in the late 70 and early 80s, you had so many bands with women in them? Then you had it again in the 90s. I wonder why that is.*

Clare: I really don't know. You've got to imagine that once the doors open that people will continue to want to go through it. The riot grrl thing was great stuff; we didn't feel we were part of it in that way, but it was a really interesting time. **Bikini Kill** and people like that were just great. I went to the **Huggy Bear**/Bikini Kill show in Edinburgh, and quite a lot of people had come along just to sneer, in a way, or not to be impressed. Why would you bother?

DH: *It's funny, I liked Bikini Kill a lot when they first came out, and wrote about them in my own fanzine back then. I brought a bunch of my drunken friends who had no idea who they were to see them at the Gilman Street Warehouse, the Maximum RocknRoll punk place in Berkeley, California. It was kind of the same vibe, definitely some sneering people, who included some of my friends, and a real odd, tense atmosphere, not much like any gig I'd personally been to up to that point.*

Clare: People did feel quite threatened by them. Sometimes people would just be threatened by an all-female band, that's one of these strange things. People would say, "Why is your

band all female??". There were only three of us, so it's not like it was a huge thing. You wouldn't say that to a 3-piece all-male band, would you: "Why haven't you got any women in the band?".

DH: *Where does the song "Heaven" (from the Slampt CD compilation "Taking a Chance on Chances") fall in to your discography?*

Clare: The recording of that was from the same time we recorded the second EP. It was one of the early ones as well, we'd been playing it for a while and was one of those songs that was just "around" since we started gigging, really.

DH: *And it came out after the second EP?*

Clare: Yeah. We had quite a lot of stuff that we did that didn't come out at all. There were basically part of the same recording sessions but just more of it. I've listened back to it at times and thought, "Well, that's pretty good". It's a shame that it's just hiding away somewhere. Vesuvius did a driving tape at one point, and we had something for that, a song called "Queen of the Road" about a truck driver, and we were saving it for that, but we got replaced on that by a band called **Sonic Youth**, I don't know why.

DH: *Oh – what's up with that?*

Clare: Yeah, we've got quite a few different things, some silly covers as well. One thing we used to do in our sets was a cover of "Get Off The Road" from "She-Devils on Wheels". I worked it out from a dodgy VHS copy of the film that we had. I don't know of any other copy of "She-Devils on Wheels", actually. We used to play that, and it was definitely a lifesaver. We also did a cover of "All Women Are Bad", a Cramps song, that was good fun as well.

DH: *What brought about the end of Sally Skull, and when was that exactly?*

Clare: 1998, possibly earlier on. Saskia had moved across the country, and it was becoming more and more difficult to keep things together, really. She'd possibly had enough as well, I don't know. It'll be interesting to see what she says. I would have carried on, I think, but if everyone's not up for it, that's the end of it, really.

Saskia: I had spent quite a lot of time traveling and then came back to the UK and decided I wanted to do something else with my life – so I settled down in the country and had a child ... music was kind of put on the back burner for a while and when I got back to it, it was easier to practice and write with my husband than travel to the city for rehearsals. But my child's almost a teenager now so I'll have plenty more time for traveling and rehearsing again in the near future.

DH: *The band existed really at the beginning of the internet age. What sort of pros and cons do you see for having been making music in the 1990s as opposed to right now?*

Clare: It's much easier to get your stuff out there now. If you want to know what a band sounds like, you can do that

almost immediately, which is a good way to reach out to more people. Organizing tours, and letting people know that you're playing, is a lot easier as well. It's still quite hard to get noticed, I suppose. It makes things more visual as well.

DH: *Is there anything that was better about making music in the 1990s as opposed to now?*

Clare: Obviously it was much easier for people to make a living out of it, though that didn't really figure at our level. People did actually want to *buy* the record. For smaller bands, I think people still do, to an extent. I know I like to buy stuff from small local bands, and actually have the vinyl. Vinyl's come back now, so it's actually quite trendy.

DH: *It really does seem like it's come full circle. That's part of the reason I'm even putting a fanzine out now. I mean record stores are actually opening to sell vinyl. It's something I never expected ten years ago.*

Clare: I remember in 1996 showing a friend, "Oh look, our record's just come out", and he said, "Oh, why did you put it out on Betamax?". We could have just done CDs, but right

now I'm quite glad to have our vinyl.

DH: *In a lot of ways it adds to the mystery of your band, too, because believe me, I couldn't even find your stuff on an illegal file-sharing network. Nobody had digitized it and put it up there, which got me even more excited to track it down – the thrill of the hunt that you don't usually get anymore.*

Clare: There are some people that are becoming more clandestine. My husband's quite into black metal, and it's a badge of honor not to actually tell anybody anything, and to release everything on a C-90 cassette.

SALLY SKULL DISCOGRAPHY

1995: "The Tantivity Tracks" 4-song 7"EP (*Vesuvius*)

1995: "Raven" – song on compilation 10"EP "In Spelunca" (*Vesuvius*)

1997: "Fractious" 4-song 7"EP (*Slampt*)

2005: "Heaven" – posthumous song included on "Taking a Chance on Chances" compilation LP/CD (*Slampt/Troubleman*)



Saskia & Katrina at Cas Rock, Edinburgh



Clare in the recording studio

SALLY SKULL SALLY SKULL SALLY SKULL

HOUSEHOLD

Those of us oldsters who haven't caved and given up on twenty-first century music completely *still* can spend an inordinate amount of time scheming for that web-enabled dopamine discovery rush that might come from tripping upon a happening new band or artist. Because the *lameness-to-lasting* ratio is so ridiculously high - it only *seems* higher than in generations past, now that everyone's respective demos & assorted jots and titters are available online, thus diluting the quality pool further - it only fuels the internet-addled brain to seek out the shockingly good that much more.

HOUSEHOLD are one of those that are shockingly good, and who found (*and are finding*) their audience in just such a manner. I personally came across across "Items", their late 2011 LP/digital download, via a mention in someone or another's blog post, or Tumblr, or some such. Its wiry, skeletal jitter was such a refreshing burst of agitated minimal-pop panic that it instantly validated AI Gore, Tipper Gore, Gore Vidal and all the other inventors of the internet for giving us said instantaneous musical delivery mechanism. "Items" strips down rocknroll to a bare core of fluttering, female-propelled minimalist rock with only a bare modicum of roll, wrapping it in a blanket of warmth and a sparse separation of instruments that sounds both vaguely sweet, nervous and harsh at the same time.

To date, Household's debut is one of my favorites of our young decade by a country mile. The two NYC-based women, **Talya Cooper** and **Isabel Freeman**, whom Household is centered around have recently unleashed their second record, an EP called "Elaines", which, like its predecessor, is also available on vinyl via Dull Knife Records and via download at household.bandcamp.com. "Elaines", as Talya elaborates here, is very much in a league with past compositions, yet has a slightly softer core that moves them a step away from, say, The Urinals and marginally into more Young Marble Giants/Marine Girls territory while remaining very much its own thing. You'd be hard-pressed to find a better duo (with occasionally-enlisted drummers-for-hire) working the circuit these days, and I wanted to make sure for this magazine's inaugural issue that I secured an interview with them.

The following exchange took place over email late in 2013.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Jay
Household: Talya Cooper (*guitar and vocals*)

Dynamite Hemorrhage: You've been tarred with the "minimalist"/"arty"/"postpunk" brush - which, all things considered - probably isn't all that bad, nor far from the mark. What sort of lineage do you feel the band's sound descends from? Are there specific bands or records you all share as being foundational for what Household is doing?

Talya Cooper: "Minimal" hits right on the mark--my favorite

music makes the most out of the fewest possible elements. A lot of the bands that get cited as reference points for Household, especially Slant 6 and Young Marble Giants, are hugely influential for us. We love obscure rediscovered post-punk 7"s as much as anyone, but also I'm completely obsessed with New Order's guitar lines. When I was writing the songs for "Elaines," I was listening to a ton of Marine Girls and also a lot of early PJ Harvey, who Isabel got me into pretty recently. Dry and Rid Of Me are such well-edited records; everything fits perfectly in its place.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Were there bands before Household? I mean, that you were in.

Talya Cooper: I played in my first band with my best friend about a year before Household began. I learned guitar as a kid but it never occurred to me that I had any knack for songwriting and had determined that my inability to play blazing Kirk Hammett-style riffage prevented me from being seen playing music in public. Sometime in my mid-20s, I discovered that hanging in the practice space and writing songs was not merely a chill way to knock back some PBRs with my ladyfriends, but also represents a crucial step in keeping myself alive as a 9 to 5'er who stares at a computer all day. Anyway, the band was called Snacks, which thankfully is as ungoogleable a name as Household. Our music is not on the internet and, though it holds a special place in my heart, you will never hear it. Our hit was about going to the planetarium.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: How would you describe the evolution of the band's sound from "Items" to "Elaines"?

Talya Cooper: I hate to say "this record is more mellow" because people are always making more mellow and thus "mature" second records and nothing could be lamer, but yeah, we made room for a couple slow jams. I found these songs more difficult to write. Items came out of a lot of anger and disappointment and I think Elaines pertains mostly to what comes after that--when you shake it off, take stock of things, try vainly to make sense of the world. A lot, if not all, of the songs on Elaines have to do with what it means to call New York my home, a place where enormous changes take place at every last minute (sorry, Grace Paley), where you have to change incessantly even if you don't always want to.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: From what I gather, Household are a "local" - New York/East Coast - sort of concern. Are there plans to change that, with touring etc. - or is that difficult to square with other aspects of your life - like, say, jobs?

Talya Cooper: Sadly, yes--the two of us are grown ladies with office type jobs. We also have a rotating cast of very generous friends who play drums for us, all of whom have other bands.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: When "Items" came out you had it

downloadable for a mere \$3 on your Bandcamp page. Did this reflect a lack of confidence in downloads, an aggressive pricing strategy or was it a special gift to the people?

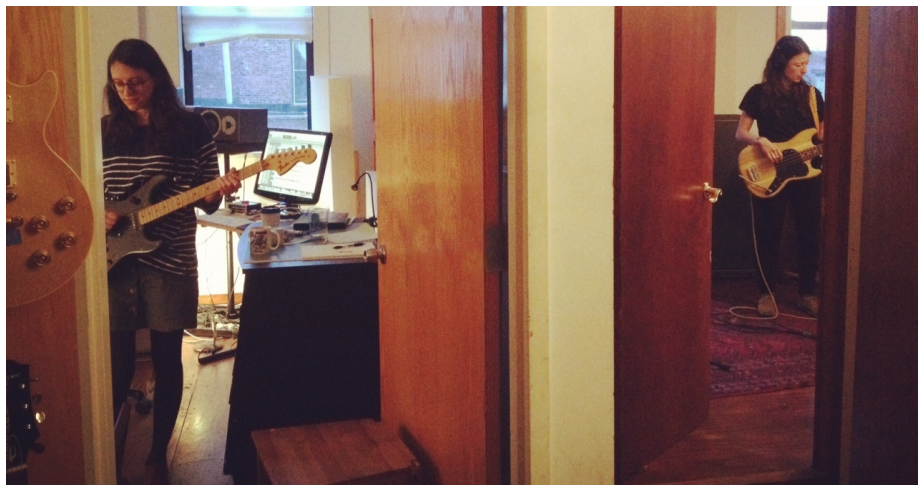
Talya Cooper: Initially, we had the record available as a free download! We had no intention of pressing it until Brent from Dull Knife contacted us and offered to put it out. The first iteration of Household broke up right around the time we finished the record; we were proud of it and just wanted to share what we'd done. I gave away all the copies of the 12" I had to my friends. I'm pretty wedded

to physical media (even though in my professional life I'm a digital archivist, ha ha) and I figure that anyone who wants mp3s can probably find them for free pretty easily.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Incidentally, how much does a band get to keep from a Bandcamp download, and is this a model that you like?

Talya Cooper: It's about 15% per download. I'm cool with it-- it's really easy to use, access, search, etc.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: I'm always interested in how a band like Household – or any band, really – reacts to the



current landscape for distributing music and for getting noticed. What's your overall take on how you're compensated for your music, and how do you feel about a world in which streaming is becoming the main way people listen to bands?

Talya Cooper: We had bizarrely good luck with Items; we made a record we liked, we told our friends about it, they told their friends, and here we are. As a music fan/record collector I have a lot more negative thoughts on the current state of blog-rockin' and scene punks and digital streaming oligarchs than I do as a musician. I take music very seriously to the extent that I expect fair treatment and compensation, but I also came up in

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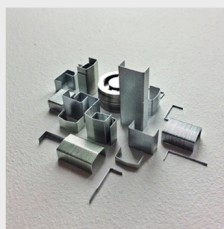
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developed, and the strengths I've gained through being in this band far exceed \$\$.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Talya, I know you were playing bass in a HC punk band called In School; are you/they still together, and are there any other side acts that the members of Household are playing in?

Talya Cooper: In School continues to confuse and annihilate bros up and down the East Coast of America. We have a 7" coming out this winter on Kill Test and hope to do quick West Coast tour at some point in 2014. Isabel is a film editor and the most recent movie that she produced and edited, "Stephanie In the Water," a documentary about surfer Stephanie Gilmore, is hopefully coming to a screen near you. Our currently conscripted drummer, Jay, plays in a band called Sapphire Mansions whom you can & should check out, and our second-to-last-temporary-drummer Nick, who generously offered his talents to the recording of Elaines, is touring the planet in Holy Ghost!

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Is there anything particular worthy of note with regard to playing music in Brooklyn and New York City at this time? How has "the scene" evolved in the three or so years you've been playing as Household?

Talya Cooper: We only play about once a month so I hesitate to make any sweeping statements about the scene or the city. There are still great spaces new and old, there are still a million shows every day, it is still hard and annoying to haul all your gear around the city. To keep

it positive, a great conversation took place recently at a DIY venue called Silent Barn about safer spaces, and I'm excited to see that discussion continue and bear fruit. You can find a write-up of the panel in issue 23 of The Media (fuckthemediacom.com) and see also the essential zine "Bros Fall Back," (google it! there's a PDF!) which discusses issues about spaces in Philly but which I find equally applicable to shows and space here.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Are there other local bands that you'd call yourself as part of a community with, and if so, who?

Talya Cooper: There have been in the past (Little Victory RIP! And my friend Serge was in a million bands we used to play with all the time but he moved to the Yukon) but things move fast, we move slowly, and we play seldom so no one stands out. Edan Wilbur, who books shows and does sound at Death By Audio, is a wonderful dude who runs a great space with love and some mysterious source of energy/tolerance, and who has given us a ton of support. Our record release show in December featured a few fellow travelers: Air Waves, Aye Nako, and Sapphire Mansions. Generally speaking, Household and In School bands have found shows within the queer scene to be the most welcoming and unquestionably the most fun.

I'd also say that because of the way music circulates now--because Household is really in its second life, which was in no small part jumpstarted by a community of ladies and musicians who found our record and pushed us to keep going--we belong to a community of like-minded, similar-sounding, and extremely righteous bands that has nothing to do with geographical proximity, bands like Neonates and Priests, whom we were lucky to play with this fall. I'd also use this space to plug a compilation called Beyond Inversion which features Household, In School, and many such fellow-travelers. It's compiled by two amazing humans named Jes and Sean and will benefit Rachael's Women's Center in Washington, D.C.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Finally, since I know you've got exceptionally stellar taste in music, give the Dynamite Hemorrhage reading community a handful of obscure records or bands we should be seeking out and championing.

Talya Cooper: Obscure, ack! Lately I've been preparing for the cold season by hoarding Joni Mitchell LPs and blasting the Meat Puppets. But hmm, let me think. My favorite records of this year is the none-too-rare Body/Head LP, which completely took me by surprise, the Irreparables LP (which is actually a pressing of a cassette from a couple years back) and all music by British juggernauts Good Throb and associated acts (see also: Croup, Family Outing). For oldies but goodies go for the LPs Kath Bloom did with Loren Connors, the Fraser & Debolt record - I listen to a ton of folk and country, no shame - and of course The Fates - Furia.

household.bandcamp.com

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Bona Dish.



The plethora of full-LP blogs of a few years ago – you'll recall blogs enabled by "Mediafire", "Rapidshare" and all the like-minded file hosts that are now pretty much gone – unearthed so much lost sub-underground goodness (and, naturally, heaping amounts of crap) that it became an unconquerable smorgasbord of downloads competing for one's time, attention and hard disc space. I recall finding a blog called **No Longer Forgotten Music** who tended to specialize in cassettes, dating back in many cases to the self-releases of the early 80s, particularly from the provincial little DIY bands who dotted the UK seaboard and countryside, to say nothing of London and Manchester.

BONA DISH were one of these bands, whom I downloaded from that particular blog on a whim, and was promptly stunned by the first-rate songs, the weird art-

student musical pastiche of avant-experimental ideas (violin, crashing metal and tape loops), and the lovely female vocals that gave the tapes a decided pop sheen that kept them very rooted in the bedroom pop ethos of the day. Certainly those of us who loved the post-1979 insular DIY songs that trickled out on the "Messthetics" and "Instant Pop Classics" comps – my favorites include **I Jog & The Tracksuits**, **Animals & Men**, **Metropak**, **Beyond The Implode** and the early **Scritti Politti** – found another winner in Bona Dish's mastery of the undefined and developing, nearly-anything-goes form.

Bona Dish's 1981 and 1982 cassettes were, of course, lost to time except for the few moldering in boxes in their hometown of Hertfordshire and in the hands of truly dedicated collector scum. It wasn't long, however, that certain corners of the internet became abuzz with the news that the remastered tapes, along with some bonus tracks, would be pressed up as "The Zaragoza Tapes, 1981-82" on Captured Tracks, and made available to the greater people. As it turns out, the LP/CD is even more wonderful than downloads ripped from a cassette and placed on the interweb, if you can believe it. The remasters truly make the songs pop, and paint a picture of a band somewhat criminally overlooked in the absolute glut of vinyl and new bands that exploded across England in the wake of punk a few years earlier. "Scratchy indie noise with a knowing cool" indeed.

I got it in my head that I needed to get the back story on Bona Dish directly from the folks who made it happen thirty-plus years ago, and was heartened with Steve and Shelford Chandler, the males of the half female/half male group (who are brothers, and who were each in a relationship during the band's existence with the women in the group), took me up on my offer to conduct a cross-Atlantic email interview. Here's what we talked about.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Jay
Bona Dish: Shelford Chandler, Steve Chandler

Dynamite Hemorrhage: The Captured Tracks reissue makes it pretty clear that your collective tastes in music, while different in parts, coalesced around a core of Bowie, Iggy, Faust and some contemporaries. Did punk, circa 1977, make much of an impact in your lives, or was it more the opportunities rising from its popularity and ethos that made it important for you?

Shelford Chandler: The Punk thing was a big influence, but more from '76 than '77! We were hooked from the start; it was like we were waiting for it to come along. It had a huge impact on us (me and Steve), fired our imagination in terms of what was possible, the whole "ideas are more important than technical ability" thing. We had stacks of ideas and no discernible musical talent and started a band right away with a couple of like-minded friend, The Roughnecks. I was more drawn to the New York scene: The Voidoids, Television, Ramones, but I also loved the DIY nature of the smaller UK punk bands like The Cortinas or The Boys, and brought all these one off singles - 2 minutes of unrestrained energy. Hearing the Sex Pistols or The

Clash on the radio in late 76/early 77 was also a big deal. For a very short time it really did feel like being part of something new and dangerous.

DH: Who were some of the Hertfordshire-area local bands that you'd play with and hang out with?

Steve Chandler: We played with the Marine Girls and Portion Control a few times; once we'd heard Tracy singing 'Night and Day' it was obvious she was in a different league. There was this one brilliant band/duo called CF Kites, almost like 60s film soundtrack-type stuff meets futuristic pop, totally original and beautiful. You can find a few of their tunes on Soundcloud. We never really hung out with other bands; there was a lot of healthy rivalry.

DH: Can you paint a picture of what a typical local gig was like – the types of bands that would play, the venues, and who typically was showing up?

Shelford Chandler: It was very varied, depending on where we played...there was a growing club scene around this time, coming out of the new romantic thing which we were never part of, but it meant people were open to our kind of creative approach. Our close friend Kevin Saunders started a local club night in Hertfordshire, which would attract a very eclectic crowd. There'd be hyper trendy's wearing the latest fashions which they'd blown a month's wages on, dressed-down charity shop hunting dudes, secretaries in their party wear, punks, mods and a lot of art students! There were a lot of paying 'parties' as well, like a local version of the London Warehouse party scene, but these were in village halls! We played at a few of these, that was great because it was basically playing to your mates.

We sometimes played on our own, and sometimes with other bands like Portion Control, Marine Girls, Tin Soldier, CF Kites. There was no 'band' scene as such, all these bands were completely different but we were definitely the least musical but (I guess we thought at least) with the most art/attitude! We never rehearsed enough, but it was about the act of doing it, not the show or the musicianship. We always set out to do something different, like stripping it back to just bass/drums/voices for some songs, or playing behind sheets of plastic which we brought from the DIY shop and put up ourselves. I remember Bill Clarke (CF Kites, and my oldest school mate) devised a performance art thing for one gig where we attacked a shop dummy with an electric drill!

DH: You took some pretty aggressive marketing steps in getting your material noticed by John Peel, which worked. How crucial was getting played on his show circa 1981 – and were there other means of getting attention in the wider UK, like Sounds/NME/Melody Maker?

Steve: The music press was completely inaccessible unless you had a record deal, which we didn't, or even much ambition to get attention beyond playing a few gigs for fun. We sent tapes to Peel because we thought he'd like it as he played "Actress" off the Rupert compilation. ('Rupert Preaching at a Picnic' was a compilation LP of Hertfordshire Bands). At that time the John Peel show was the only hope for bands like us to reach a wider audience.



Shelford: I'm not sure we saw it as 'marketing' - the tube was the idea of Pat from In Phase, genius guy. We loved it because one of our favourite albums at the time was Metal Box by PIL, and this felt like a smart-ass in-joke...calling it "cardboard tube". This was our only attempt at any overt marketing! There were probably no other viable ways to get noticed, we'd have been very lucky (and very happy) to get anywhere near NME, we wouldn't have been interested in the others though, Sounds was a joke for new heavy metal fans and Melody Maker was for old rockers.

DH: Did you feel somehow more obscure and undiscoverable because your music was coming out on cassette at the time, instead of on vinyl, or did you feel that was a legitimate and normal manner of music consumption in '81-'82?

Steve: A cassette release was more a practical option, because we were very obscure and that's what was on offer from In Phase. It also gave us a lot of control over the product in terms of how it looked. In some ways the visual/design aspect was as important as the music.

DH: Do you know how many of each of the two tapes were made?

Steve: I think it was 200.

DH: In "Mutation", why is Amsterdam "the place to go"?



interest in us to be honest. We recorded an album in late '82 but had to shelve it because no one would release it, not even the record company that paid for the studio because they thought it was too experimental. After that we just assumed it was the end for Bona Dish. So we are still stunned and really happy that Captured Tracks have put out The Zaragoza Tapes, which basically collects our two In Phaze cassette releases (C30 and Cardboard Tube) plus a couple of unreleased tracks.

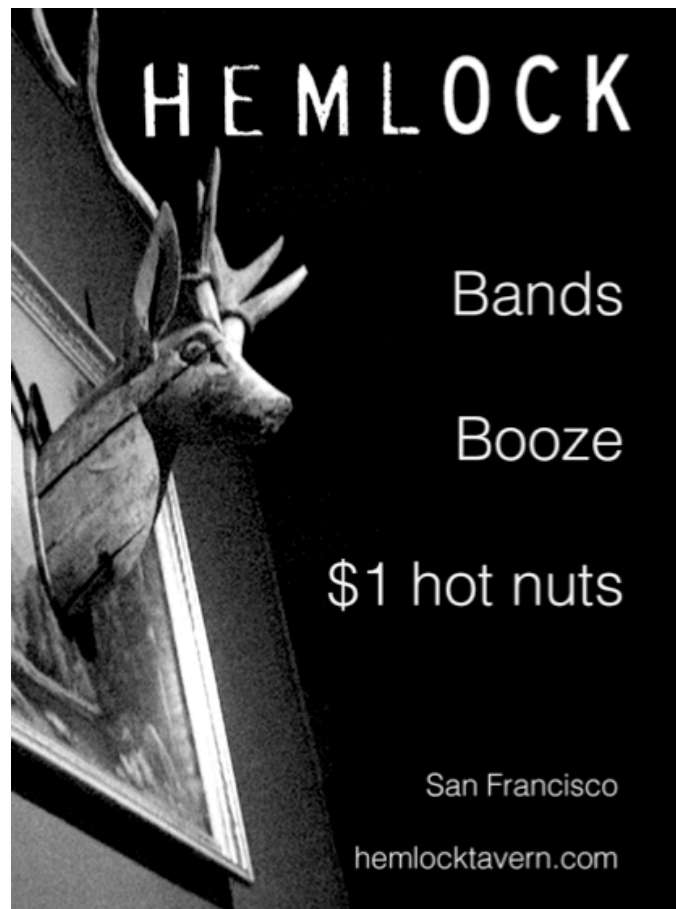
DH: You're one of the only bands I've heard of with a boyfriend/girlfriend dynamic in the band – two pairs in your case, in addition to brothers – who didn't break up because of it. What ultimately brought the band to an end?

Steve: Not sure what you've heard but that is *exactly* what brought the band to an end.

DH: You've probably had many years of explaining to people what your early 80s band Bona Dish sounded like. What's your typical answer?

Shelford: Scratchy indie noise with a knowing cool....but wish I could say Kraut-rock meets Punk-rock.

Steve: Velvets meet Supremes in restrained chaos.



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THE FLESH EATERS

Chris D. on Los Angeles punk rock, fanzines, Upsetter -
and the Flesh Eaters - circa 1977-80



FLESH EATERS at Larchmont Hall, LA - 1978

photo courtesy of Chris D.

I don't go much for of any sort of hero worship these days in any facet of life, but if I *did* have a rocknroll hero of any kind, he'd probably be **Chris D.** Certainly the first time I interviewed the man, as a flummoxed & stuttering early 20s fanboy in 1990, his recent bands the **Flesh Eaters** and the **Divine Horsemen** had been among my most formative of musical acts, and I was a bit intimidated. To my knowledge, no tape of this KFJC radio interview exists, and this is for the good. I just missed the first wave of the Flesh Eaters (1977-84), to my eternal torment, by virtue of having been too young. Thanks to a clued-in cousin who helped hone and mold my musical tastes my freshman year in college, up to and including schooling me into proclaiming the Flesh Eaters our mutual "favorite band", I did make up for some lost time and soon became a Chris D. obsessive – lyrics, music, stories, music reviews, ephemera, you name it.

By the time the age of blogging rolled around, Chris D.'s surreal, feverish song titles had been imprinted upon my brain as high art, and I dubbed my first blog **Agony Shorthand**, after one of his early songs. Later, I christened another blog **Dynamite**

Hemorrhage after another early number, which soon morphed into a podcast and the magazine you're holding. Naturally, scoring an interview with the man for this mag's maiden voyage was a no-brainer. I proposed to him that the historical record with regard to the Flesh Eaters, and his own involvement in music overall, seemed to whiz through the 1970s. Flesh Eaters journalism, such as it is, often starts or kicks into gear with 1981's masterpiece, "A Minute To Pray, A Second To Die", as if the "punk" interlude before it was a mere warmup. All well and fine, as that record and particular lineup of the band is an LP and incarnation which I proclaim to be my very favorite of theirs, a held opinion which is certainly not solely my own.

Yet the 1970s Flesh Eaters, and Chris D.'s *man-on-scene* place as a writer, as a record label head, *and* as a man baptized in the holy water of the greatest of the great punk rock locales has seemingly been given the relative historical shaft. We decided – well, I decided, and he thankfully acquiesced – to focus this piece solely on the years 1977-80, and on Chris's involvement with Slash Magazine, Upsetter Records, the Masque and his own band. The result was the talk you're about to dig into.

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Jay
Chris: Chris D.

Dynamite Hemorrhage – There are plenty of gaps in the historical record for the Flesh Eaters' pre-1980 stuff, so I thought if you and I could focus on that era only, we might be able to make a good piece out of it.

Chris D. – I have to tell you that that's my least favorite part of my career, just because I was learning how to sing, how to perform and learning how to write songs. You know, even though I think there are some great songs on "No Questions Asked" and "Tooth and Nail", a lot of the performances before the "Minute To Pray" album leave me cold – my singing, for the most part.

DH: I guess it's kinda hard to go back to your earliest stuff and go, "*What the hell was I thinking*", but you know it's funny, for having been such a big Flesh Eaters fan for so long, that was always my *fourth* favorite album of your original four albums, but as I've gotten older I keep coming back to it all the time, and have now named two different blogs after songs from "No Questions Asked". My understanding of your early involvement in the LA music scene was that you and your wife Bonnie were big show-goers, and you just connected with the Masque stuff instantly. Fair understanding?

Chris D. – Yeah, I moved to Los Angeles in 1970 to go to college, to film school. The first year I lived in a dorm, the second year I lived in a house with a couple of other guys in the Playa Del Rey area, the third year I lived in Laurel Canyon with some other people, and the fourth year I lived in an apartment with my girlfriend, who I ended up getting married to – my first wife, Bonnie. We were going through a lot of turbulence in the relationship, in '75-'76, and in late '76-'77 we started going to a lot of shows. We ended up separating for a time and I moved to Venice, which was when I was starting to write for *Slash* magazine.

DH: Okay, so what year did you start to write for *Slash*?

Chris D. – It was the third or fourth issue, the one with Johnny Rotten on the cover. I did a review of "I Got A Right" by Iggy & The Stooges. I was living in Venice, and still going to a few shows with my wife, then we split up for good. I became friends with Judith Bell, and she and I started going out. We were going to the Masque all the time. I was trying to put together a band as early as August 1977, and gradually, by early December, I had a lineup with Tito Larriva from The Plugz, John Richey on bass, and Joe Ramirez from The Eyes, their guitar player – he was playing drums.

We went down to Randy Stodola's – he was the lead guy in The Alley Cats – and we recorded 3 songs that never came out at the time; they came out on the reissue of "No Questions Asked" on CD, and the vinyl edition that Mono Records put out.

DH: Wasn't that at one time supposed to be a single, that you guys had in mind would be your first release?

Chris D. – Yeah, it was going to be a single or we were going to record a whole album at Randy's and then put it out, but by

the time we got around to record when we were going to record more stuff, Tito was already leaving to a career with The Plugz, and that was his band.

DH: What was it that broke up that first version of the band, was it simply Tito moving over to The Plugz?

Chris D. – Yeah, having Tito in the Flesh Eaters, it was always like there were two front people, even though the one or two songs of his that we did in the Flesh Eaters like "Brain Time", I would sing them and he would just play guitar. It was getting to be too much for him to be in both bands, and it was starting to conflict with our being able to record and get dates. We played 2 shows at The Masque two shows right before Christmas in '77, then we played Larchmont Hall, then we played a really big show with The Screamers, X and the Alley Cats. We actually played a another couple other shows with X and the Alley Cats with that lineup, and I don't know if it was February or March (1978) – maybe it was April – Tito left for good, and Stan Ridgeway was in the band for about two months. He did a gig with us at The Whiskey, and he did a gig with us at the Mabuhay Gardens (San Francisco).

DH: Was that still with Joe and John from The Eyes in the band?

Chris D. – John Richey was still in the band. It's really hard to remember when Joe Ramirez left, actually. Joe Nanini might have been the drummer by then, because he replaced Joe Ramirez sometime around the beginning of 1978.

DH: The Eyes were such an active band around that time as well; how were those guys able to balance being in The Eyes and The Flesh Eaters at the same time?

Chris D. – I knew with Joe that it was going to be part-time, almost from the get-go, so I was having to look for another drummer. Joe actually left before Tito. I know he did at least the two Masque gigs with us in December of '77. I think by the time we played Larchmont Hall, Joe Nanini was the drummer.

DH: What was it that brought you into the whole LA punk realm? Was there sort of one event that catapulted you into that whole scene, or did you already have an appreciation for pre-punk sounds...?

Chris D. – Yeah, to me it was an extension. I was a big fan of The Doors, The Stooges, The Stones; I was a big fan of the New York Dolls, and other garage punk bands like The Standells. It probably wasn't until '77 or '78 that I heard The Sonics, but if I'd heard them before that I'm sure I would have been a fan of them too. A lot of the musical taste I had was the British blues-rock stuff that I liked; I kind of leaned toward that garage band feel. Certainly the early Stones, bands like Them – but I really loved all the psychedelic stuff as well, early Jefferson Airplane – I wasn't a fan of the Grateful Dead, but bands that *rocked* like Jefferson Airplane, I really loved those guys.

DH: So it really wasn't a big leap for you into the punk thing, and just showed that you yourself could do it too.

Chris D. – It was just a logical extension. I tried to have a band in high school in the late 60s, and nobody could really handle

my singing. I was modeling my singing on Rod Stewart from the first couple of Jeff Beck albums, and on Robert Plant from Led Zeppelin, and John Kay from Steppenwolf; and Mick Jagger and Jim Morrison – and Howlin' Wolf, black blues guys. The high school I went to, if you listened to Led Zeppelin or Ten Years After, you were pretty out there. Even the mainstream stuff that I was into, for Riverside, where I was living, it was too *out there* for some of the people I knew. Then again the local AM radio station had "Kick Out the Jams" by MC5 in rotation when it came out! Pretty amazing in retrospect.

DH: When you talk about your vocals, you obviously developed that style pretty early, but you were able to modulate it pretty early as well, like on "No Questions Asked" there's "Suicide Saddle", which is a straightforward monotone by your standards.

Chris D. – That was after John Doe had given me some advice, because he played on "Suicide Saddle"; he played bass on some of the songs on "No Questions Asked". He told me to break it up and not be screaming all the time, and actually do some *singing*-type singing, as well as the other stuff, which I took to heart. By the time "A Minute To Pray..." came out, I thought it was working really well, the combination of styles.

DH: Going back to the lineup stuff, what was Stan Ridgeway like as a guitarist in the two months he was with you, compared to Tito's playing?

Chris D. – It's hard to compare the two. They really had different styles. Tito had a lot of influences. Stan had a lot of esoteric influences as well, but they were really different from Tito's. Stan's sound had a little harder edge to it.

DH: Did he leave your band to go form Wall of Voodoo?

Chris D. – I don't think it was very long after he left The Flesh Eaters.

DH: And he wrote a couple of songs that ended up being on "No Questions Asked", right?

Chris D. – Yeah. The thing is, I'm kind of leaving out – what happened after Stan was The Flyboys; they came in and played live with me as well as did recording, and they played some gigs as the Flesh Eaters. They were my lineup for maybe 3-5 months. We went back down to Randy's and recorded four songs instead of three songs, we re-recorded the three songs we'd already done and a new song, "Radio Dies Screaming". We did some LA gigs, and also played the Mabuhay Gardens



FLESH EATERS, 1977 photo courtesy of Chris D.



Friday and a Saturday night. The Friday night the Flesh Eaters were the very first band. The second night, The Plugz were the very first band. Now from what I understand, even though we were the first bands each night, we think we were recorded – that what I was told.

DH: But you haven't heard the stuff?

Chris D. – I haven't. I really wish some of that stuff had come out, because that was the lineup with Tito and John Richey and Joe Nanini, and we were doing a Captain Beefheart cover, "Plastic Factory", which I really wish had come out. That was fashioned pretty good, I think. There were other Flesh Eaters songs that were never recorded, like "Automaton Bombs" and a few others that would have been nice to hear recordings. I don't know why we got left off. I later got a couple of conflicting stories. One was that because we were the first bands each night, we in fact were *not* recorded, and that's why The Plugz weren't on there either. Then I heard another story that the tapes got lost, of just the first two bands each night.

DH: What a coincidence.

Chris D. – I don't know which story was true. Brendan (Mullan) was the one who was helping to organize that stuff coming out, and I don't know what the real reason is, to tell you the truth.

DH: When you put out the "Tooth and Nail" compilation in 1978, the only other worthwhile overview of LA punk was "Yes LA", if I'm getting my chronology right. What prompted you to be the one to document it so well?

Chris D. – To be frank, I wanted to put out some Flesh Eaters stuff. I wanted to put us in context with other bands that we identified with. I really liked The Controllers, UXA, Middle Class and The Germs. Negative Trend I wasn't that familiar with, but I knew Rik L Rik well from F-Word, and I really liked Rik. The Negative Trend stuff was already recorded; it just got remixed by Rik and I. It was something to put the Flesh Eaters out there, but also to put these other bands out there that I didn't think were getting enough attention. There was a good friend of Judith Bell's, this guy Rocky Stevens from Oklahoma, he was a millionaire. He was willing to put up some money to finance the recording of the record. Which was very little, considering – I mean, most of the recordings were 4- and 8-track. I think it was 5 grand, tops, that the whole album cost.

DH: Well, out of a million – that was affordable for him, I guess.

Chris D. – Yeah, if you never see that back it's not a big deal....he was a fan, he'd go to the shows and stuff.

DH: Was Judith Bell kind of a co-founder or –manager of Upsetter Records with you?

Chris D. – I started the label with the first (Flesh Eaters) single without her involvement, but "Tooth and Nail" was with her involvement, she and Exene designed the labels on the LP; Judith designed one side and Exene designed the other



THE UPSETTER #2 scan courtesy FanzineFaves.com

side. I think that was the same with "No Questions Asked", they both took turns designing the labels. At the time, Judith and I and John and Exene were really good friends, for a period of about two or three years. We'd hang out together all the time and do art projects together. A lot of just collage art, and we used to put out a fanzine briefly, called Upsetter. It was only two issues, but it had Exene contributing to that.

DH: Wait, you say the fanzine was called Upsetter??

Chris D. – Yeah.

DH: (Crushed at my own lack of perfect Flesh Eaters knowledge) Oh, I didn't know that. Was that her fanzine, and you wrote for it?

Chris D. – It was mine and Judith's; we did it together. There was another friend of hers, Gilbert, in Hollywood, who was involved in it. He was an artist. He contributed some of the collages. Exene had heavy-duty input as well. It was kind of an "arty punk" thing.

DH: Was it generally devoted to art and words, or was it also a music fanzine?

Chris D. – It was really graphics-heavy, but it was mostly made up of interviews. There was an interview with the Germs. I remember we did a collage of the Weirdos getting blasted off stage, we were kind of comparing the Weirdos to KISS; even though we liked the Weirdos, it was one of those things where we were poking fun at some of the bands we'd see. That's something I don't know if I'd have done on my own. It was Judith, and some of the other people in the crowd, not necessarily John Doe, but Exene and Judith and a couple of the other people who were behind the scenes, you know.....stuff got a little *catty*.

DH: So you were traveling pretty closely with John and Exene at the time. Do you know why X decided not to be on "Tooth and Nail"? Had they recorded for it already?

Chris D. – No, they hadn't recorded for it already. The reason was that Billy Zoom decided, after they'd already agreed to do it, that he didn't want to do any more small-label recordings, you know, their experience with Dangerhouse - they'd already recorded with Dangerhouse, the "We're Desperate/Adult Books" single, and Billy was just adamant about holding out for a major label and not doing any more recordings for small labels. At the time they signed with Slash, I was working at Slash Records; I was one of the first people Bob Biggs hired at Slash. I think my being there helped to make things go faster for them.

DH: Right, it's almost like there's the minor league label and the major league label and Chris is at both of them already.

Chris D. – Yes, but the X "Los Angeles" album was about a year, year and a half after that.

DH: I remember reading your obituary for Darby Crash in Slash, and it was really good. I imagine you traveled in some of the same circles but not the *same* circle.

Chris D. – Are you sure it was in Slash? I think it was in No Magazine. I remember writing that for No Magazine. Darby was one of those guys who was hard to get close to. He was more friendly with the kind of street-urchin punk kids. To be frank, a lot of the people we were friends with were fucked-up, but I don't know if it was because I was from too middle-class of a background, but.....except for John & Exene and Judith, most of the people that Darby hung out with, and this isn't to disparage his friends, but most of the people he hung out with really weren't on his "intellectual" level. A lot of them were just ne'er-do-well characters around the punk scene.

DH: Yeah, I mean with you, and John and Exene coming from such a literate place, you kind of recognized quality when you saw it in his lyrics, even though those lyrics were usually slurred and hard to understand for the rest of us. I even remember that from your obituary, you made a comment to that effect, that this was a poet who was somewhat unrecognized as a poet.

Chris D. – It's really hard to qualify this stuff, because sometimes I feel some of my own stuff was pretentious; some people label John and Exene's stuff as being pretentious as well. You go to Darby's stuff, and it's really hard to label it as pretentious, because he was somebody who was total no-bullshit at all. He didn't have any pretensions of being literary. Even though you knew that he read a lot - he read all kinds of stuff. John and Exene were good friends of Darby's, but he was someone that was hard to get close to. I wasn't really close to him as a friend; I'd talk to him and our conversations wouldn't last more than five minutes. My girlfriend Judith, she'd talk to him for long periods at a time.

DH: You were such a great curator of the 1978 scene on "Tooth and Nail", but I'd heard from a friend that you'd asked Greg Ginn if Upsetter could put out some of the early

Black Flag material.

Chris D. – Yeah, it was actually because I was good friends with Keith Morris. He was somebody who'd always come to Flesh Eaters shows, he'd always be at Germs shows, he'd be at X shows, he was at the few Catholic Discipline shows that happened, and he became a fixture at all the punk shows. This was right when Black Flag was starting; the band was called Panic. I used to see him all the time; he was also good friends with Jeffrey Lee Pierce. Keith gave this cassette to Claude, to Kickboy and I. I don't know if he gave us one each or if we shared it or what, but Claude and I were just blown away. It was basically the "Nervous Breakdown" single. It was called Panic; they hadn't changed their name to Black Flag. They then put out the "Nervous Breakdown" single and after they did that I told Keith, you know, I've got Upsetter Records, it'd be really great to do a whole album with you guys.

He told me to come down to the church in Hermosa, where Greg and all those guys were starting to be headquartered. I talked to Greg, and it was something that it seemed like he had a positive reaction to, because he hadn't really formed SST Records beyond that single yet.

DH: It was like a one-off for him at the time, huh?

Chris D. – Yeah, it was something where it was a big deal – for a few months it looked like it was going to happen, and then Keith had a falling-out with those guys, and then he left the band. He was my main connection.

DH: And that was it.

Chris D. – Yep. They were really friendly, Greg and those guys, they just didn't have anything to put out. I didn't know that they'd basically recorded nearly a whole album. That stuff came out on "Everything Went Black", it was at least one side of stuff with Keith from that period.

DH: Is that what would have been the Upsetter album?

Chris D. – That was some of the stuff that would have ended up on there, yeah, if I'm not mistaken. It was so long ago that it's hard to make sure I'm right on all this stuff. When "Everything Went Black" came out I remember asking Keith, and he said yeah, that was the stuff that could have been on the Upsetter album. I was disappointed, but I wasn't angry about it or anything, it's just the way things go.

DH: Was there anything else that you wanted to put out on Upsetter that you weren't able to?

Chris D. – I don't know, if you asked me that question about Slash and Ruby I could rattle off a long list of bands, but that early on I don't think I had any kind of grandiose plans about the label.

DH: Yeah, it sounds like it was a means to an end to get Flesh Eaters stuff out there, and you had ideas that it might become more than that, but mostly it was a Flesh Eaters vehicle.

Chris D. – Right. Then when I worked at Slash, Ruby got

created by Bob Biggs as a subsidiary label that would be like Slash's budget label in terms of promotion.

DH: Of course those records you curated for Ruby are some of my favorite records of all time. I actually met you at the Anti-Club in the late 80s, and I walked up to you and there was like a "new" Ruby Records at that time, and I asked you if you had anything to do with these pop-punk records that had just come out on Ruby, and you said, "Aw, I didn't have anything to do with that SHIT".

Chris D. — Yeah, I don't know what came out on Ruby later. The last stuff I was involved with was (Lydia Lunch's 1982 album) "13:13"; I mastered that. There were other things, like the Dream Syndicate's "The Days of Wine and Roses", and "Gravity Talks" by Green On Red was originally supposed to be on Ruby Records and Bob decided instead to put it out on Slash.

DH: Can you paint us a picture of what Slash magazine was like when you started working there, what its editorial staff was like? What it was like "going to work" at Slash, if that's what it really was?

Chris D. — No, no, it wasn't really like that, the only people who went to work there were Claude and Philly, and Steve Samiof and Melanie Nissen, those four people — at least in the beginning. In the beginning, the first five or six issues, it was Claude and Philly living down at the beach in Venice; Steve Samiof and Melanie were a couple also, and they had a loft somewhere and did all the layout stuff there. There was another

guy, Paul Zacha, who died of a cocaine overdose in 1980 or '81. It was before Darby, so I think it was 1980. He was involved a little bit behind the scenes with the magazine, graphically. About midway through the magazine, I don't know when it would have been, probably 1979, they got an office on the corner of Fairfax and Santa Monica, southwest corner of that intersection, on the second floor.

That's where I worked with Jeffrey Lee, because he was doing interviews for them and I would occasionally go up there, there was no internet at that point, and we would actually type up our reviews and bring them into the office to be typeset. It was either late '79 or early '80 when Bob Biggs bought the magazine, and that was around the time he was contemplating starting a label. The Germs album, the "(G)" album, was starting to take shape, and he got the office on Beverly and Martel, which was southeast of the Fairfax/Santa Monica area.

DH: I know you wrote a ton of reviews under a bunch of different pseudonyms, but did you do more than write for the magazine?

Chris D. — In 1980 I got hired by Bob to handle the distribution; he had the whole upstairs floor and this corner office. There was another very small storefront downstairs that held all of the back issues of Slash in it, and it also had Slash Records stock, once the records started coming out. The offices were there from 1980 to 1996, 1997, something like that, and I was there on the payroll and I would send out bundles of Slash to different newsstands and bookstores and record stores and places like that all over the country, that had subscriptions and would get

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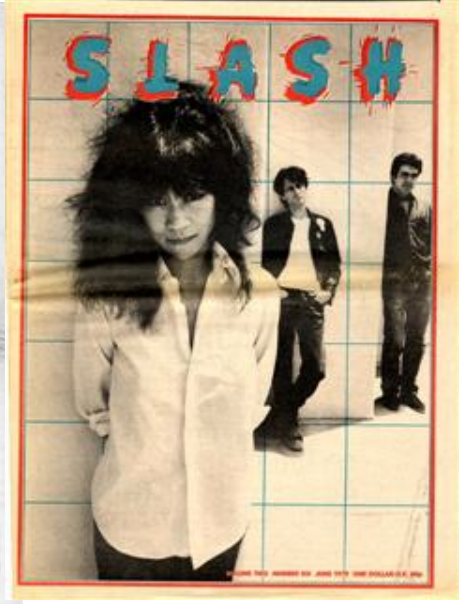
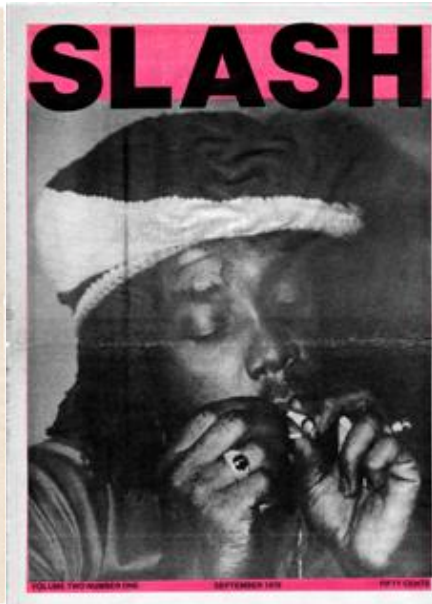
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— David Keenan, Volcanic Tongue

RUBBERNECK



**ISSUE 8
IN**

JANUARY



12 or 20 or 5 issues or whatever every month. I kept the ledger books and kept track of who was keeping up with their accounts and who wasn't.

DH: You were accounts receivable!

Chris D. – Yeah, I was kind of accounts receivable, and when they started the label, the very first couple of people who were hired on the label were Mark Williams, who was an English writer, and the accountant Mark Trilling, and then I was like the third or fourth person that got hired by the label. I was one of the A&R people. I was one of the only people who never got any percentage stock points at Slash; it was totally my own stupidity, if I'd have really pushed for it, I could have....you know, there's people now who got points at Slash who did much less than I did. The only ones I still see any money from are the Ruby records, but anyway....that's my own poor business savvy, "I'm beyond business"-type personality.

DH: Claude was obviously a larger than life personality, at least what I've seen on film. What was he like to work for or work with?

Chris D. – What you saw on film is what you got in real life. He was very outspoken, and he did not tolerate fools at all. He was a chain-smoker; he always had a cigarette going, he always had a beer in his hand. Very friendly guy, I got along with him pretty well.

DH: And you guys were really big reggae fans at the time. Was he a big influence on your reggae fandom?

Chris D. – Oh yeah, definitely. He and Jeffrey Lee were probably neck and neck in terms of who knew more about the stuff. When Jeffrey Lee came on board, it was like two fanatics. I really got into the stuff for a while too, but never at the level that Claude and Jeffrey did. They were just, like, fanatical. Jeffrey was like that, you know, at the same level as Dave Alvin and Phil Alvin in terms of knowing about blues, country blues and country music. Just knowing the most obscure fucking people you can imagine.

DH: I've seen issues of Slash where you were reviewing Prince Jammy, and King Tubby and stuff like that, so you were obviously pretty into it at the time.

Chris D. – I definitely liked the stuff. I don't have any of those records now; then again, I don't have a working stereo at the moment.

DH: You had that 2-second appearance in "The Decline of Western Civilization" in the offices, where they just kind of showed you and your name. Did they ever shoot interviews with you for the film that ended up getting cut?

Chris D. – You know, the last day they were doing interviews, I could have gotten interviewed. My girlfriend Judith and I, we had just gotten back from Mexico the night before, and we had driven all night from San Felipe in Baja, and we were both really hung over. I just blew it off. It was my own fault, because I could have been interviewed but I just blew it off.

DH: Aw, well who knows if they would have used it anyway, right?

Chris D. – Yeah, I don't know if they would have used it, but then again, I wish I'd done it. It is what it is.

DH: Do you know of any plans to reprint the Slash magazines in book form, the way the "Search and Destroy" magazines were?

Chris D. – I don't know; you know the guy who did the "Fucked Up and Photocopied" book, Bryan Ray Turcott? He was supposed to be doing a book; I don't know if it was supposed to be a compilation of stuff, like a compendium of all these interviews, or if it was going to be more a book *about* the magazine.

DH: Yeah, I just wish somebody would print that stuff. It would probably be several volumes, but...

Chris D. – They had a Facebook page for a while there, but I don't know what ever happened to it. It's been in the works for 4 or 5 years. I'd like to scan every original record review that had ever been in *Slash* magazine, the way they originally were – that could be a book.

DH: So to close things out here, I have a “capper” question. After you recorded “No Questions Asked” with your studio band, you moved away from “punk rock” as then commonly defined. Did you feel by 1980 that you personally wanted a clean break from punk rock, or was it more, “this is where my music and my tastes are leading me”?

Chris D. – I don't know that it was any conscious decision. The hardcore thing was starting to happen right then, the beach crap thing had already taken off. I wasn't into it that much. A lot of the songs that were on “A Minute To Pray...” were either melodies or rhythms that I'd heard on African tribal records, world music-type native recordings, stuff that was really not recognizable as rock and roll, pop music or anything even remotely like that. I transcribed ideas from the melodies, rhythms and chants, African indigenous music – so about two-thirds of the songs on “A Minute To Pray...” came from that kind of musical background.

There's other influences on there, like “See You in the Boneyard” is heavily influenced by Link Wray and Bo Diddley.

Most of the other stuff is indirectly influenced by African tribal music. I was trying to re-imagine, in a way, what the original interpretation of that stuff in the late 1800s, early 1900s must have been like, the original Mississippi blues – what their roots were, and then try and transpose that. It sounds sort of pretentious to say that. There were still a lot of other influences on it, from R&B to the Velvet Underground to the Doors, the Stooges, Bowie.

DH: We'll stop there in 1981, to keep this pure. Thanks so much for doing this.

*Chris D. has been exceptionally prolific as a writer the past decade, and just released two brand new short novels called **Volcano Girls** and **Tightrope on Fire**, respectively.*

*These new novels are in addition to the massive, very well-received compendium of Japanese yakuza films he first released in 2005, **Outlaw Masters of Japanese Film**.*

*If you can find a copy, definitely get your hands on **A Minute To Pray, A Second To Die: A Collection of Writing**, which comprises song lyrics, poems, essays, short stories and dream fragments, and came out in 2009. Lots of **Flesh Eaters & Divine Horsemen** recollections and other grist for the proverbial mill.*

He currently lives and works in LA.



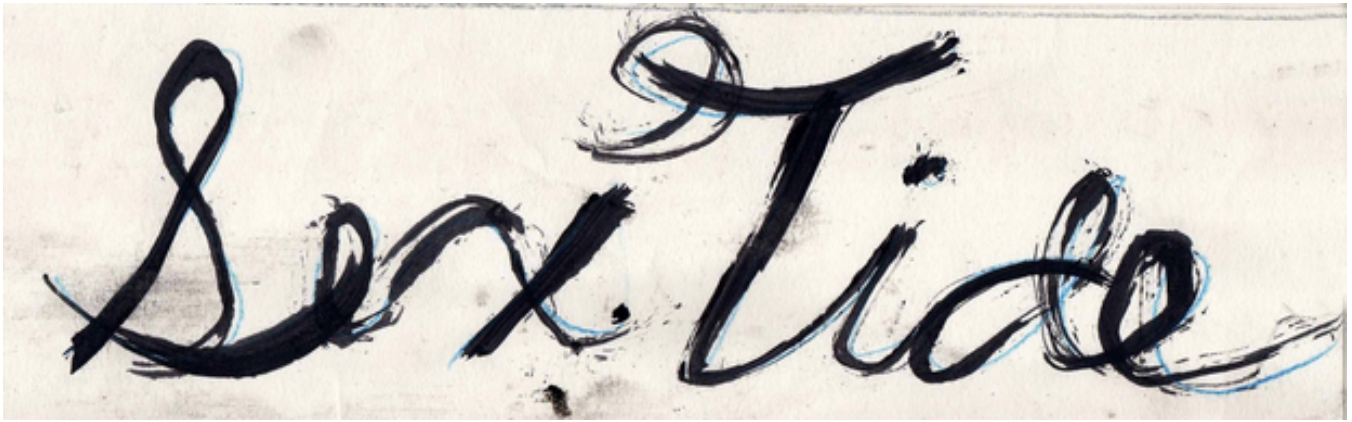
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If their debut vinyl offering "Flash Fuck" is any indication, Columbus' **SEX TIDE** have clearly been drinking from the same polluted waters of Ohio that have spawned countless warped noisemakers performing their own sort of deconstructed CPR on the corpse of rock'n'roll – from Devo to The Cramps to the Thomas Jefferson Slave Apartments to Times New Viking. The Columbus trio's messily no-fi garage stomp is straight out of the Lux/Ivy League & makes your average neo-*Nuggets* band sound like Steely Dan by comparison, with stand-up drummer Aurelie Celine hollering over the twanging & stuttering dual-guitar racket like Moe Tucker after her initiation into a leather-coated girl gang.

These are songs that have been stripped down to their roughest, most skeletal basics, without unnecessary extravagances like a bass player, or cymbals, or a VU meter that doesn't stay pinned in the red. Fuck that noise. And you've got to hand it to Sex Tide, because you can tell that they really know their history – if you're going to record a seven-songs-in-20-minutes suite of acid-casualty garage scree, you'd better go analogue all the way, recording it on quarter inch tape (presumably in a cave) and mastering it like you'd never even heard of a computer. The magic of that authentic filth rubs off particularly on the wobbling, feedback-kissed 'Laudanum' & the tom-thrashing, snarling barnburner 'Shakes (She's Got)'.

By nature of being scuzzy, off-kilter and from Columbus, I imagine that there will be many lazy parallels drawn between *Flash Fuck* and some of the key players in last decade's shitgaze non-phenomenon of blown-speaker anti-pop that found its epicenter in (obviously) Ohio. And they would be lazy, because unlike Times New Viking's starry-eyed Flying Nun idolatry buried in tape hiss, or Psychedelic Horseshit working the transient random noise bursts with bong smoke angle, Sex Tide's primal howlings owe more to the groovy hate fuck attitude of Pussy Galore, or The Cramps before them, than anything to surface yet in this millennium. They're hardly reinventing the wheel, but they are joyously throwing thumb-tacks underneath it, which is way more fun to watch. - Erika Elizabeth

Dynamite Hemorrhage – Jay
Sex Tide – Aurelie Celine

Dynamite Hemorrhage: Sex Tide's such an intense and intentionally sloppy mix of some of the best & brightest dirty garage bands of the past several decades. How would you characterize the sound you're going after, and who are the role models that helped you get there?

Aurelie Celine: First off, thank you- that statement is a bit heart stopping. Three (or four??) years ago I obtained a drum kit from a friend. Chad and I resided in the same building at that time, as we do once again. I was nearly going to implode if I didn't go to another space to make a racket. I threw various pieces of my kit into our elevator and Chad then asked to come along to my venture to our disgusting basement. He joined; we made terrible noise and howling until very early in the morning. That night, Chad recorded it and various pieces of my drum kit would fall into a large pit that we played next to- we would stop playing- I would run down the stairs, grab my things and put it all back together and start playing once again. We were surrounded my rusting pipes, dilapidated walls, years of disintegration and a severe lack of ventilation. It was the perfect space to be possessed by





Neanderthal aggression and emotion. (This space is also where our video- "Laudanum" was shot.)

We continued to practice in this space for quite some time. Chad and I weren't going for a particular sound or genre in the formation of our band. It was just the two of us playing music for well into a year before adding an additional guitar player.

With the addition of another player, we began weeding out the sounds we didn't really like and pushed forth with the songs that we liked but wanted a bigger, fuller sound without changing our own dynamic. There was no real archetype of our musical composition, no preconceived notion of the type of music we wanted to play. Or those we wanted to emulate.

That being said I know that I didn't want to be "soft" with my voice. This is the only thing that I can really pin down...that I wanted to make sure that I was doing in this band. I didn't want to have a distinctly high or effeminate voice.

I have a lot of role models musically – and yes, even local role models that have inspired me to pursue this project. On and on.

DH: If you don't mind, please run us through the band members and their roles as well as any past or present bands they might have played/are playing in.

Aurelie: Chad Shepherd: *guitar, original member & current member (other bands current and former: Sword Heaven, TSS & various other projects)*

Christopher Corbin: *guitar, current member (Geraldine, Dropdead Sons)*

Aurelie Celine: *vocals, percussion (art project/performance mostly associated with Chad)*

Davey Highben: *former guitar player (AS*US)*

DH: What is it that's made Columbus such a first-rate town for raw, intense music the past two decades, especially when compared to Cleveland and Cincinnati? Ohio State? Cheap rent? Mike Rep?

Aurelie: Ohio is an infected breeding ground for raw and scuzzy music. Columbus does in fact have moderately priced living quarters but this is not the only reason for which I believe great "fuck you, fuck me- we're all in despair" rock and roll is created here. Columbus brings travelers via the interstate, drugs & crime. Inspiration and defeat.

There are many dedicated individuals who bring exciting, inspiring touring acts coming through, sometimes on a nightly basis. There are art programs provided by the city that supports local musicians with needed gear and replacements of items they may have been lost/stolen/whatever. These items can seem daunting/overly expensive but might be needed items, we have practice spaces that you can rent that do not drain your bank accounts and we have the heavy weight of history... With all those who have come before us in the Columbus music veins, we feel ... I feel a weight to continue pushing forth in filthy, raw and in this semi-contained art form.

Mike Rep is very dear to me; he lives right outside the city of Columbus. For most this might be a bit picky geographically... But he hails from Harrisburg, Ohio. Although he is very close to the city. He lives in a breathtakingly beautiful area. Close to the Darby Creek and has been successful with his own creation of so much music because he has had a clear separation from all of those devil dawns and nights that might distract his artistry. I respect this fully. But it ain't Columbus, although he has (very) strong ties to Columbus.

DH: My one and only trip to your town in appx. 2000 left an



impression of a closely-networked scene of bands, often clustered around Used Kids Records and the people who work there. How accurate is that fourteen years later?

Aurelie: Are there still musicians and those who support the musicians that work at Used Kids? Well, yes. They are quite supportive of promoting bands, music and records of all sorts... of course. I wouldn't go so far as to say it that a tight knit community revolves around this store. I highly enjoy my visits and conversations to this record store... I just don't picture it as a large gathering of musicians who are pushing/promoting and playing together. We are aware and give knowledge of each other's projects but I'd say we are more loosely gathered and respect each other's craft.

DH: You're part of a long line of singing drummers and a much shorter line of standing drummers, but are pretty rare as a *standing/singing* drummer. Any obvious role models or predecessors who gave you the idea to organize your band this way?

Aurelie: Ha! I just had a conversation about this in Brooklyn when we played there. (This comment is made fairly often at our shows but it is usually made to someone besides me.)

It was most comfortable for me to stand up and drum. As I improved some of my equipment, it made it even easier. I honestly couldn't see doing my vocals in this band sitting down, so I don't. I didn't really think of the organization of our band when we first started. It just felt right and everyone sort of fell into the roles they were comfortable with.

I do have to say, those that came before me... strengthened me to continue as a female vocalist and drummer. Sometimes, other males become passive aggressive/aggressive toward me and my

position in the band. And women such as: Ellen Hoover (She stands and drums & when she sings-fuck! It is amazing! "Skull & Crossbones" is so perfect.), Lydia Mendoza (Her live performances are rattling & haunting), The women in the Carter Family (The song "Single Girl, Married Girl" specifically, oh the chains of marriage.), The Cramps (That hip shakin' beat! It is all so intoxicating!) En Vogue blew my mind as a young girl. (I would LOSE MY MIND when I would watch Cindy Herron take off her jacket and kick it straight into the crowd on, "Don't Let Go".) really... a long list of strong performers, specifically female fronted of a variety of time periods and genres inspired me to push forth in my musical endeavors.

DH: How did you get together with A Wicked Company to put out your new LP?

Aurelie: A Wicked Company contacted us directly after hearing about us through a mutual friend. He offered to put out a 7" of our current material. We recorded for a month in Chad's studio. After going through many piles of tapes, we constructed a much longer list than we could fit on a 7". There was a family of songs that we just didn't feel as though should be separated. We approached A Wicked Company with the idea of releasing a full-length

album and they agreed to do so! So, everything really fell together quite well. We are very grateful for their flexibility and generous support of our project.

DH: I'm always interested in how a newer, younger band like Sex Tide – or any band, really – integrates themselves into the current landscape for distributing music and for getting noticed. What's your overall take on how you're compensated for your music, and how do you feel about a world in which streaming is becoming the main way people listen to bands?

Aurelie: I like that individuals can listen to our music online, for free... at any moment. I think it is an important tool especially before you release a record. It can be useful for promotion and as an aid for booking shows.

That being said, our record- FLASH FUCK- was meant to be heard on vinyl. It's meant to be listened to at a louder volume on that specific medium. Will everyone choose this format? No. And I think that's fine. Those individuals are just not experiencing our record we intended it to be. Or exactly how we intended it to sound.

If you enjoy our music and it happens to be via our bandcamp page, then I'm still incredibly happy that that person has the ability to hear our music.

DH: What's a typical Sex Tide live performance set time – do you have set parameters for how long you like to play, or is it as long as your time slot allows?

Aurelie: I usually write set lists that fit the bill of who we are playing with and how many other bands are playing. I would say a fairly normal set is around 25 minutes. I don't really like

to push it much further than that unless it is a special occasion. (Meaning: someone who may ask us to play for their party or what have you.)

DH: Any ridiculous gig stories of mayhem, destruction, indifference or hate?

Aurelie: When we played DC, we played with Priests for their 7" release show. We played in the basement of a bar and it was PACKED. We couldn't move, I could barely push through with my bass drum to make it on stage. My anxiety was soaring; I could hardly breathe- let alone move through the crowd. After we set up. ... the vice clamp on my tom decided to no longer be the anchor I needed it to be. I had to use someone else's drum and I was blind as always. After our set, an individual introduced himself. I shook his hand and his face was a blur due to my heightened state of anxiety... all I wanted to do was walk outside and breathe with my arms outstretched. Later, I realized that it was Ian Svenonious who I had met in the basement. Many months later, I was able to speak with him much longer in Columbus and make up for my erratic vision and speech. This

was one of my favorite shows that we have played to date. (With the exception of playing with Mike Rep & The Cheater Slicks)

DH: Finally, where shall we expect the band to take things from here, after the 300 copies of your LP have flown off the shelves and you've broken the internet from all the Bandcamp page downloads? Are future releases + tours on the way?

Aurelie: We are currently recording for an upcoming 7" that is going to be released by Columbus Discount Records. After we are finished with this record, we will start writing and recording for a new record. Yet to be determined how this might be released. (All analogue- once again!)

Discography:

FLASH FUCK LP (*A Wicked Company*)

sextide.bandcamp.com



WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH **FUCKIN' RECORD REVIEWS**

...by the editor of the Fuckin' Record Reviews Tumblr/blog...

Lather a guy up enough times with praise and he either calls the cops or calls for a favor. Fortunately for us here at **Fuckin' Record Reviews**, in relation to Jay Hinman, it's the latter...we think. Since our tumblr opened shop on July 17, 2013, we've lavished much praise on Jay's original print missives in **Superdope** (1991-1998) - so much so, he commissioned us to talk about him some more in this inaugural edition of **Dynamite Hemorrhage #1** (at 1987 indentured servitude wages, mind you).

The nerve of this guy taking advantage of our admiration and good will. As if he's the only saggy-titted, expanded waistline baldy zine editor worthy of listicle commemoration in an actual 2013 *print* zine. So instead of fawning over Jay's previous accomplishments like he wants, we're here to chat up some of yesteryear's print music zine heroes not named Jay Hinman... or Jimmy Johnson or Byron Coley (**Forced Exposure**) or Tom Lax (**Siltbreeze**) or Gerard Cosloy (**Conflict**) or Lisa Carver (**Rollerderby**). Anyone holding **Dynamite Hemorrhage #1** in their hands already knows plenty about them, *right?*

But first, we offer some self-serving historical context. What follows is partially borrowed and modified from an interview **Fuckin' Record Reviews** gave to *The Wire* in August 2013. We had no idea HBO was interested in such things and thought they'd put the series out to pasture, but much to our delight and surprise they contacted us about our lil' tumblr and published a mini feature in the Unofficial Channels column of the October 2013 edition (the one with Matana Roberts on the cover). It was swell, but only a couple of our lines were used. So here's the rest...

One evening in early July 2013 a bunch of the **FRR** senior staff were lounging around barefoot in bed clipping our toenails as we took turns reading aloud Richard Morton Jack's *Flashback Issue 2, Winter 2012* (which is quite good, by the way). More specifically, we were reading Richie Unterberger's article *Yesterday's Papers* (pp 7- 29), the one where he laments how rock music publications from the '60s and '70s "are inaccessible to all but the most dogged collectors and intrepid scholars" (pg 7). Unterberger's argument is this: the unavailability of rock mags from the '60s and '70s results in a distortion of the culture's narrative. The unavailable information, culled from real time interviews and reviews, cannot exert its proper influence on subsequent knowledge and perceptions if no one knows about it. The situation Unterberger was complained about with regard to 60's and 70's zines holds true for '80s and '90s zines, *if not more so*, given the latter's inherently disposable format and relative lack of cultural cache. A collective light bulb flashed, moldy boxes were opened, we all got sprayed for paper lice and **Fuckin' Record Reviews** was born!

Our sleuthing (i.e., five minutes sifting through Google results)

reveals that virtually nada exists online about '80s and '90s music zines. Although Jimmy Johnson offers a stash of classic *Forced Exposures* at the FE website and Jay has indeed posted *Superdope* for easy download, other than a few items on eBay and GEMM and scattered remembrances on walled off Facebook pages, there is hardly any online (or off line as far as is known) preservation of the cultural phenomenon known as the music zine. Therefore, the singular purpose of **Fuckin' Record Reviews** is to highlight a particular corner of the fanzine omniverse from 20+ years ago, one that's presently inaccessible and under appreciated - if not unknown - to those interested in the history of countercultural music effluvia between 1984 and 1997. Without accessibility and documentation, the influence of these zines remains unrecognized 'cept for fetishists like us. *It's like it never happened.*

But it did happen! While this may be old news to you, we'd go so far as to agree that the tide of underground print music zines + left of the dial radio + increasingly reliable touring circuits generated a critical mass of energy and fans around the 1987-1991 period and "the industry" (as it existed) was unable to ignore the wide range of underground music and associated weirdness any longer. And so, genuine teen spirit was returned to the western middle class masses and print music zines, disposable as they might've been, were recognized as integral in wrestling the culture back from the corporate ogre (one could even walk into a Barnes & Noble or Borders and nab a copy of *Ptolemaic Terrascope* or *Chickfactor* for a while there). So sez Carducci and Azzerad and Jarnow, and if they agree on little else besides how great the Minutemen were, they agree about that.

Alas though, it was not to last. From the perspective of **Fuckin' Record Reviews**, the music fanzine culture represented by *Superdope* and kin was eclipsed soon enough by the rapid surge of internet and mobile platforms in the late 90s, as were most print outlets. The turn of the millennium, accompanied by a swell of straightforward and easily workable online communication options, saw precipitously diminishing returns for anyone interested in creating a personal empire of opinion *via print*. Blogs were effortlessly birthed and thrived (hello **Agony Shorthand**), while print zines died (RIP **Superdope**). But by that time, most of our heroes from the golden age had already moved on to greater or lesser things and ceased publishing anyway. We all know how tangible media became almost suddenly and surprisingly archaic around Y2K. Consumers who still cared enough evolved as well, shifting their discretionary spending to online access and driving the value of print and audio media to practically zipppo. We're guessing that most music zine readers also probably tossed their yellowing print copies in the trash at some point between moves from their college dorm back to their parent's house and

then to their first or second dumpy apartment. The succeeding generations just skipped tangibles altogether and started blogging and social networking, a much more efficient and immediate way to connect with like-minded heads, donchaknow? So here we are in 2014 and the print zine era is a dubious specter on *YouTube* comments pages and decade old *ilxor* threads. It seems no one much cares about or recalls those zines, 'cept those of us who lived and breathed for the things.

But then again, maybe we're wrong about that. The exuberance of those who pile on the **FRR** tumblr daily suggests there may be some interest in resurrecting, collating, documenting and historicizing what Marc Masters described as "partially like chain letters between music geeks, partially like underground alternatives to staid mainstream criticism, and partially like the cable-access-style ranting of people with no other outlet" (*Pitchfork* 8/13/13). After all, you are holding this copy of **Dynamite Hemorrhage #1** in your hands while perched on the throne, just like old times, are you not? So, in addition to the household names, which are the sub underground music zines worth remembering? *We thought you'd never ask!* It just so happens we have a short list. But please, don't start crying cuz your pet project isn't listed or we don't bow to the pre-'84 punk cut 'n pastes or we could give a shit about *MRR* or *Flipside*. There's nothing stopping *you* from starting your own **Fuckin' Record Reviews**, is there? Besides, we'll do this again next year, right Jay? Jay?

DAMP



Our man from South Willington, Connecticut, Kevin Kraynick, seemed to emerge fully formed onto the zine landscape in '87 with the first edition of *Damp*. It ran for six issues between 1987 and 1991 and unlike the majority of even the best zines, took its purview to be the counter culture antecedents of mid 80's underground rock. Cover features about Captain Beefheart, Tuli Kupferberg, Harvey Pekar and Snakefinger were in stark contrast to those simply rubbing uglies with our heroes on the pig fuck or twee circuits

of the day. *Damp* #5 was the legendary Beefheart issue, for which Kevin polled the era's cognoscenti (Glenn Jones, Thurston Moore, David Greenberger, Byron Coley, Ace Farren Ford, Matt Groening, Nigel Cross, Phil Milstein, Eddie Flowers, Zoogz Rift (!), et al) about their top Captain picks in every realm. He even called Don Van Vliet on the telephone and transcribed the conversation.

Damp #1 and #2 featured an in depth two-part interview with Byron Coley, a writer to whom Kevin (and *many, many* others) owe a small debt. Included for our enjoyment were some politically incorrect impostor pix of Byron and Jimmy Johnson too. Kevin rarely minced words or tagged along for the ride everyone else was fluming on. Of course, he rallied the usual collective of regional pals to contribute, folks with names like Dead Bob and Mark Lo and Bruce Newlywed and Joe Malinowski, all of whom have suspiciously disappeared, just like Kevin himself. The final feature in *Damp* #6 from 1992 was all about the *Eightball* universe and allied characters from the mind of Dan Clowes.

DAGGER



Dagger was, is and always shall be Tim Hinely. First published from the backwoods of a New Jersey ranch house in 1987 and still being published in print to this day, he's the congenial guy next door who looks like he should be coaching a Cinnaminson, NJ Little League team or barbecuing on the 4th of July while retelling Jackie Martling jokes. Instead, Tim channels

his Protestant work ethic, informed as it is by a fevered music hound's tilt, into lionizing underground rock no-counts working the crease. (He probably coaches and barbecues too.)

The early years of *Dagger* during the late 80's and early 90's found Tim interviewing the Antiseen, hitching a ride in the Surgery van and yucking it up with A-listers of the highest order, like Tesco and Mark Eitzel and the beloved yet exasperating chosen ones in bands named Killdozer, Christmas, Honor Role, Dinosaur, Urge Overkill, the Laughing Hyenas, et al. What makes that worthy of remembrance and distinguishes Tim's zine is his congenial lover's tone and inexplicable earnestness, like it's as natural to be passing Suckdog's *Drugs Are Nice* down the church pew as it is the collection plate. Should fellow parishioners look agape in his direction, he'd simply declare convincingly, "There's no problem ma'am. It's a great record!" Tim and friends still post daily sermons to this day at the *Dagger* website and he issued *Dagger* #46 - on paper, mind you - in November 2013.

WIND UP

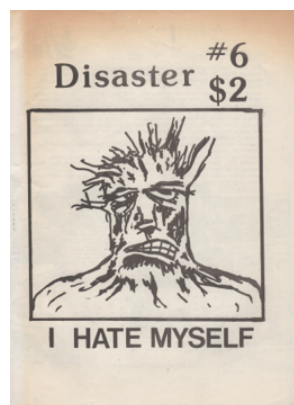


Not so much a record review zine as the personal diary of coffee and soup aficionado Liz Clayton, *Wind Up* actually offered very little in the way of fuckin' record reviews. In contrast, Liz spent the 90's interviewing bands, submitting questionnaires, sharing recipes and highlighting the happenings in her life and the lives of her friends from Michigan to Chicago to Ohio and beyond. So

what, right? Were there not hundreds of young Americans doing the same thing at the time? Maybe, but Liz wrote within the frame of a music head in love with her times and did so with classy aplomb. She changed the title of the zine with each issue, publishing five or six distinct epistles between 1991 and 1997: *Wind-Up Toy*, *Wind-Up Frozen Entrée*, *Wind-Up Toaster Pastry*, *Wind-Up Industrial Burnoff*, *Wind-Up Butter Cow*... Like her Editor-In-Chief colleagues around music zine nation, Liz also nurtured a syndicate of like-minded writers, many of whom were musicians. Her crowning zine achievement was the 1996 issue *Wind-Up Butter Cow: The All Ohio Issue*, which, as can be deduced, exclusively cheered Ohio bands and culture: Gaunt, Moviola,

My Dad Is Dead, Scrawl, TJSA Bela Koe-Krompecher (“sum him up in seven words or less!”), as well as Ron House trashing the 4AD editor fanny who wrote *The Offence Newsletter*. Liz’s book *Nice Coffee Time* was published by tinyperson press in 2013.

DISASTER



Owned, operated and published by Chicago’s Bill Callahan, known in National Public Radio circles for the past 20 years or so as Smog and/or Bill Callahan. Before his unconditional conversion into a performer of notable command (and really, one should not overlook Bill’s combustible alt-beard corpus), he seemed to ache out loud in the 6 or 7 issues of *Disaster* between 1986 and 1991. He was somewhat unfairly derided at the time as a devout Cosloyian, but what acid tongued young wisenheimer worth his or her weight in ink, working the sub underground rock scene, could escape the sway of Gerard Cosloy at

the time? (Besides, Gerard had beaten everyone to the page by publishing the inaugural episode of *Conflict* in 1979 and was in full sway by 1984.) Bill was caustic, but unmistakably sharp and personalized his listening in harsh terms. His odes to Jandek still stand as some of the best writing about the man from Houston we’ve ever read. Bill hitched a ride with the Suckdog caravan in the early 90’s and subsequent dedication to his own musical creations rendered *Disaster* defunct by 1992

CRANK



Wide eyed and as sharp as a yeti, Marc Masters issued *Crank* #1 from the back of a Williamsburg, Virginia record store in 1991 and took it to four issues by the beginning of 1994. Marc was and is based in the Mid-Atlantic region and consequently, endorsed both Butch Willis & The Rocks and Jonny Cohen’s Love Machine simultaneously, without feeling the least bit self-conscious. His humor and style evolved into a straightforward discourse by the fourth and final issue, which by the way offered a lovely Alan Licht/ A Handful of Dust split 7”. Like many zine bosses, Marc also enslaved a cadre of eager soldier buddies at first

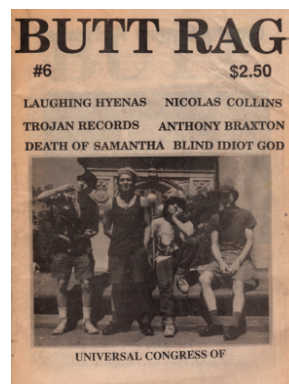
with names like Heather Lesser and Dave Whelan, but afterward it was all Marc.

One of the hallmarks of a great music zine is the Editor-In-Chief’s ability to develop an unapologetic center of gravity unique to him or her, thereby cultivating a shorthand bond with the reader who, *we all must admit*, is looking for a guide. We know upon reading that last sentence many of you will rend your shirts in indignant objection, as any challenge to your well-fought iconoclasm is likely to be a threat to your very existence, but calm down and fear not. We all need trustworthy leaders with a streak of beneficence to help us spend our money in the right places. Speaking of money, Marc is one of the few who gets paid for writing about music in 2013, superbly covering all manner of outsider music for *The Wire*, *Pitchfork*, *The Washington Post*, *the Village Voice* and

the Independent Weekly, as well as many others.

(Caveat emptor: Marc’s been a handmaiden to **FRR**’s success, highlighting our venture at all points in his online empire. We give thanks and commit heartily to the bias.)

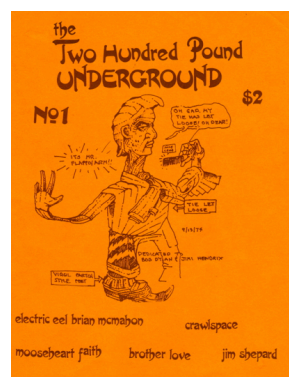
BUTT RAG



How many words Peter Margasak could fit into a single issue of *Butt Rag* (1987 -1992) was a phenomenon unto itself. A Chicago based writer and bon vivant, Peter offered some good features (Scrawl, Giant Sand, Fish & Roses...), but really hit his stride when writing extensive reviews about all good musical things from Charles Gayle, Blind Willie Johnson and Universal Congress Of to McKinney’s

Cotton Pickers, Harry Partch and everything in between. It’s astounding to us how one person could commit so many reviews to a single issue of a zine without the constant and immediate reinforcement we’re so accustomed to in 2013 via the networked ether. But Margasak cast his net far and wide, and we recall name checking the history of recorded music as a function of his enthusiasm for taking the rock underground scene of the day as a cue to search deep. We still carry around our lists of the Columbia and Bluebird reissue series, Black Saint/Soul Note vinyl and HatHut cds, as *Butt Rag* was an excellent and reliable addition to similarly catholic entries by Richard Meltzer and Robert Nedelkoff in *FE*, or Bill Shute’s reviews in that zine from southwestern Pennsylvania. Margasak also ran a record label called...*Butt Rag*, issuing at least six 7” by Repulse Kava, The Biggest Square Thing (Sue Garner, Rick Brown and Ruth Peyser), Timber and everyone’s favorite jukebox pick, Borbetomagus. He continues to write for *The Chicago Reader*, where we think a desk has called him friend since 1996.

THE TWO HUNDRED POUND UNDERGROUND



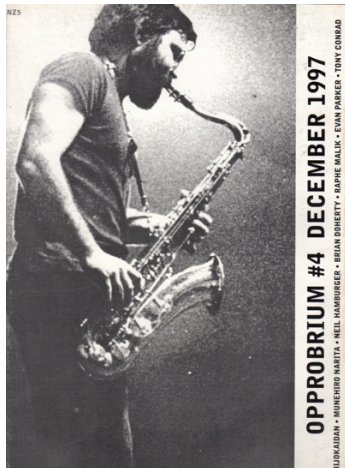
With a pedigree so hardcore it hurts, Tony Rettman somehow massaged an impressively perpendicular turn by the summer of 1996, at which point he spilled his guts into what would be the first of only two issues of *200LBU*. Arriving at the tail end of the period we cover at **Fuckin’ Record Reviews**, Tony blathered about the broadest range of good stuff imaginable, with all the

enthusiasm of a convert’s zeal. Sure, the aforementioned zine classics from the 80’s carved wide and navigable paths, and bonzowie enthusiasts like *Ptolemaic Terrascope*, *Kicks*, *Ugly Things* and *Butt Rag* carved deeply, but Tony took a fresh look and it rung true. He’s also probably younger

than the majority of elders listed here, so he was probably unburdened by the unquestioned alliances associated with a 1950s or 1960s birth date. It was refreshing to see the Hampton Grease Band, the Green Ray, the Impressions and Bridget St. John on the same page with the latest scum fuc offerings from Audible Hiss and Rip Off Records (and that's just one page from *200LBU #1*). Likewise, Tony is one of the few people in the universe we could reliably stop on the street to discuss the breathtakingly radiant beard of the five Help Yourself records issued on Liberty/United Artists between 1971 and 1974. (Doug Mosurock is another.) We'd include a link, but seeing how this is print and all...

Like Marc Masters, Tony seems to earn actual money in 2013 writing about sub underground music of value for *The Village Voice*, *The Wire*, *VICE*, *The Philadelphia Weekly* and many more, whether the subject is throwback nods to his hardcore schooling, current rave ups of worth like Nude Beach and Chris Forsyth or reissue treats from Black Task and The Wicked Lady. With regard to hardcore, in 2010 Tony published the well received and tasty *Why Be Something That You're Not: Detroit Hardcore 1979-1985*.

de/create & OPPROBRIUM

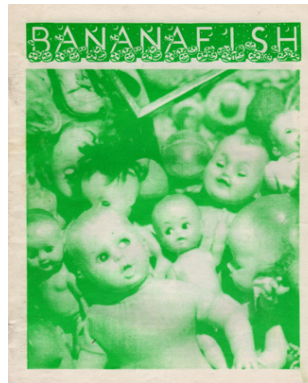


There was a period in the mid 90's when a guy from New Zealand named Nick Cain was on fire. Ignoring his studies to stand in the lyceum and rant devotedly about Keith Rowe or Frank Lowe, he launched *de/create* in early 1994 with a friend of his brother's named Iain Cowper-Smith. While any fan of loudly improvised noise and scum from the time would lay down cash without thinking for a zine endorsing Ascension, Sparkalespy and Incapacitants, in retrospect the four issues of *de/create* – good as they were – seemed a training ground for Nick's second act, solo, in *Opprobrium*. As far as we can tell, *Opprobrium* lasted four issues (the last in December 1997), and bristled with all the supercilious discharge of the late 80's finest. Championing purveyors of outsider zoinks in all incarnations, *Opprobrium's* clarion call attracted handsome heavyweight writers of the previous era, including Tom Lax, Marc Masters and the Dead C's Bruce Russell. *Issue #4* with Peter Brötzmann on the cover also featured Hijo Kaidan, Raphe Malik, High Rise's Munehiro Narita, Evan Parker, Tony Conrad and Taco Bell's 21st century nemesis...Neil Hamburger! Was there ever an *Issue #5*? We don't recall that there was.

As with all mortals, it seems Nick buckled under the cost and weight of producing a regular print zine and transitioned in 1998 to the world wide web. For a time he helmed an equally fab online gig (the name of which we forget), but it too seems long gone. Like so many descendants of the Dúnedain from the lost kingdom of Fuckin' Record Reviews Arnor (ahem), Nick found a 21st century home writing for *The Wire*. His pieces continue to be essential. We wrote on 8/20/13 that Nick's "profile on German composer Jakob

Ullmann in April 2013 was revelatory." It was.

BANANAFISH



about me us.

Fresh off a stint of writing for the 1980's version of *Arthur Magazine* – the San Francisco based *BravEAr* (itself featured at **FRR** and certainly deserving of a festschrift) – Seymour Glass spun a tangled whirl of controlled chaos from 1987 to sometime in the early 00's. In fact, *Bananafish* even featured at one point an interview with the editor behind the curtain of **FRR**! But enough

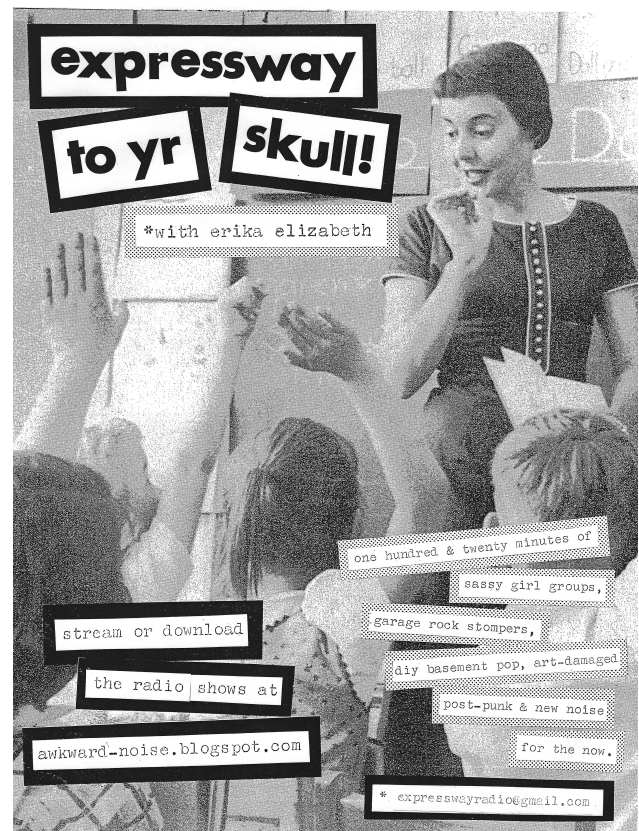
Concrete evidence of Seymour's existence includes an interview by Marc Masters for *Crank #2* in 1990 and many years in *The Glands of External Secretion* with baseball enthusiast Barbara Manning. While *Bananafish* incorporated consistently incisive, funny and solidly discerning record reviews, the bulk of Seymour's print empire included a compelling funhouse mirror presentation of kooky perversions, upside down interviews, found letters, disturbing peek-a-boo sketches, shadow puppetry, grocery list commemorations and a celebration of spectacular fetichisms within the boundaries of the outsider music scene and the associated personalities of the day. Every issue was also accompanied by a worthy 7" or CD of featured artists collated by Seymour or his minions, creating the impression that he was the Sterling Smith puppet master of San Francisco (at least to those of us not living on the west coast). Absurdist? Stream of conscious? A giant put-on put on by the San Francisco Giants? Nowadays, ain't no one talking.

Over the long arc of its existence *Bananafish* celebrated grotesque silkscreened comix, scum fuc slummers, indie rock beards, international noisicians, surrealist filmsters, transgendered astrophysicists, free jazz polemicists, New Zealand electricity demons, goony politicians, ranting next door neighbors, collagists, killed by death stylists and telephonic pranksters...and when the lights came on, we were all tethered together in an inescapable tangle of our own making, whatever we thought our personal esoteric fancy may have been...and Seymour was gone.

So you've made it this far and finally read about Seymour, in the news that found it's way to where you sleep and seek to be, where you are and hear and see. Upon review, it's clear we've only scratched the surface. We're embarrassed by the underrepresentation of international zines, not to mention those helmed by women. Should Jay invite us back and provide more lead time, we'd expound affectionately on *Popwatch*, *Blue Persuasion*, *B Side*, *Alley Oop*, *Killer*, *Muckraker*, *Year Zero*, *18 Wheeler*, *Escargot*, *Swellsville*, *Bucketfull Of Brains*, *Ugly Things*, *Here 'Tis*, *Flaccid*, *Alright!*, *Sporadic Droolings*, *The Pope*, *Matter*, *Brushback*, *Your Flesh*, *Ugly American*, *Matter*, *Yet Another Fanzine*, *Blurt*, *Dead End Street*, *A Nest Of Ninnies*, *Ptolemaic Terrascope*, *Tuba Frenzy*, *Lowlife*, *Too Fun Too Huge*, *Rock Mag!*,

Chemical Imbalance, Loaded, Dangerous Rhythms, Show Kai, Love & Laughter, Cosloy Youth, Cut, Away From The Pulsebeat, Wipeout!, Chickfactor, Speed Kills, And Suddenly, Escandalo!, Cle, Caught In Flux, Big Yeah, Halana, Wooly Bugger, The Cimarron Weekend, Murder Can Be Fun, Girl Germs, BravEar and the many more you're gonna let us know we're dopes for by not listing them. We look forward to it:

<http://fuckinrecordreviews.tumblr.com/> OR
perspectivesFADT@gmail.com OR Facebook
 OR Twitter.

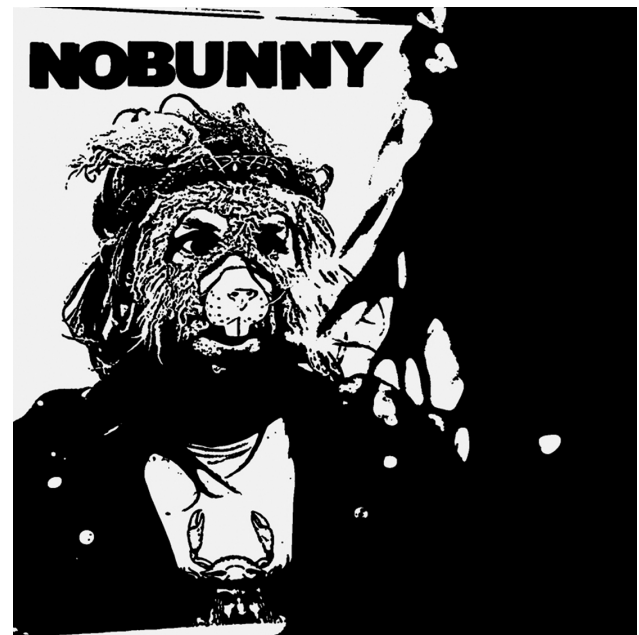


Out now on Aarght Records



AMUSEMENTS LP/CD AARGHT025
 "They sound like some dumb kids who think they know how to play songs because they heard a couple of KBD comps and have seen the Screemers Target footage. Big deal."

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RECORD REVIEWS.

ABOVE GROUND – “Gone Aiwa” LP

This posthumous release of space-filling 1983 art/noise recordings proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that Bill Dieren is one weird cat. I saw him play a solo set early in the year, and it was then as now clear that the conventions of rock music and linearity mean little to him; in fact, the set of disjointed improv folk and jumbled lyrics was nearly identical to one I’d seen him do in San Francisco in 1994. How heartening, I guess, to know that his lost New Zealand side project/band Above Ground from over a decade earlier was in the same vein, with a little more rock heft and cohesion, yet still given to the sort of mystical psychedelic organ-grinding trippiness that characterized so much of the Bilders/Builders stuff – often for better, sometimes for worse. The bong never seems too far off, but Above Ground still has that harsh-toned, weathered Velvets-love lurking in the crannies of every riff and keyboard flutter. Whether that’s listenable enough to merit a purchase is a real tough call. I’m personally so enamored of the man’s 1980s highs that “unreleased Bill Dieren” is a siren song toward a lightened wallet, but objectively, others may not be so willing to grab hold of that limb. (*Siltbreeze Records; siltbreeze.com*) - Jay

ALLIGATOR – “Runners” LP

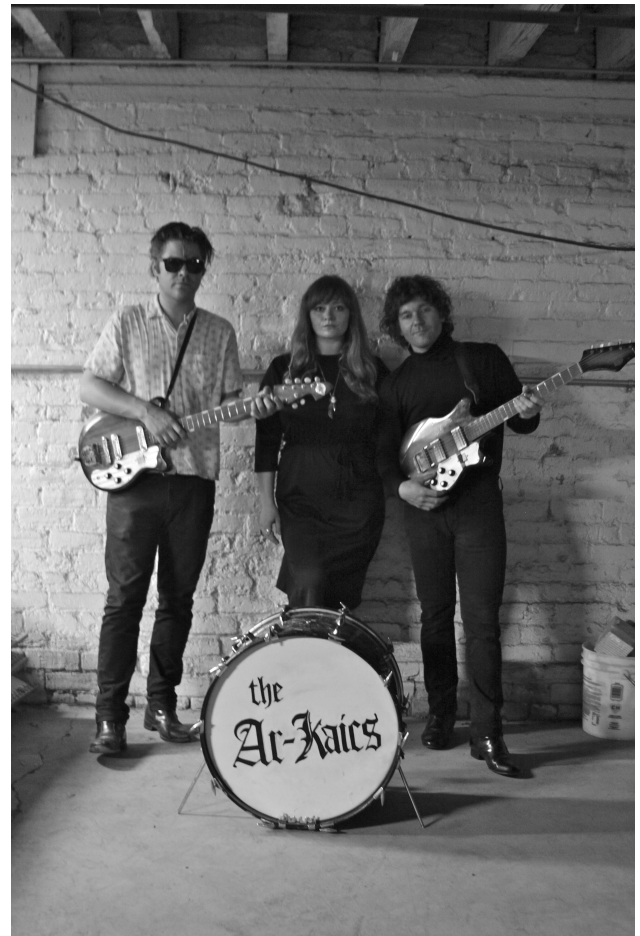
Alligator are a minimalist bass and drums (not *bass-n-drums*) duo from France – though one of the two Alligators is an American creating her own *mise-en-scène* in Lyon. Their LP is a full breath of simple, unpolished DIY, full of lilt and a little ruckus from time to time, sorta like Austin’s Yellow Fever before they had to go and change their name. By necessity this duo has a smaller musical footprint than, say, a monstrous doom-metal quintet, but bassist Elizabeth Hargrett still wrings all manner of fuzz and distortion out of otherwise clean bass lines, and can bend her pipes around some of the pretty abstract cobwebs that she and bandmate Lisa Duroux are spinning. I don’t know how they’re collecting any francs on this thing, but the digitally-inclined should be aware that it’s available for free download as of this writing. (*Corn Dog Records; moncul.org*) - Jay

THE AR-KAICS – “THE AR-KAICS” LP/Download

Totally spot-on 60s throwback garage that avoids the common trap of being substantially lamer than its precedents. This Richmond, VA trio proudly call themselves troglodytes, like Strom Thurmond I reckon, and they’re fashioned a batch of songs cut right from the Keggs/Alarm Clocks/Things To Come/Larry & The Blue Notes cloth. That said, The Ar-Kaics sound is substantially more raw whilst being better recorded than their heroes; is fully devoid of keyboards; features a terrific vocalist straight out of the Cavern Club; and they even did us the favor of saving their lone bluesy ballad for the end of the record – or the download, since at least at this writing this thing is nowhere on vinyl save for a couple songs out on 45. Just to make it clear how *nails* these folks are in exhuming the spectre of ’66, song titles include multiple g-droppers like “Can’t Keep Waitin’”, “Movin’ On” and “Givin’ Up”. You need to hear it to believe it, as four decades of mediocre retreads have made “60s punk-influenced” descriptions serve as a blinking cue to look elsewhere. You can do so at (*thearkaics.bandcamp.com*) – Jay

AUSMUTEANTS – “Ausmuteants” LP

I stayed on the sidelines for the great synth-punk excavation and revival the past decade, preferring instead to stare at my hand or dream of England. Matter of fact, even the much-beloved Screamers, the ancient seminal synthpunk band of yore, went further on attitude, iconography and timing more than they did tip-top songs - but who’s really to say, right? Australia’s Ausmuteants have a synth, and they’re punkers, and no small number of their songs even recall the Screamers, Fatrix, Devo and that whole ilk. Unlike them, *their* album is tip-top, a breakneck collection of dead-to-rights dance/punk, right in line with San Francisco’s Numbers from over a decade ago, and nearly as good. Song titles like “Kicked In The Head” and “Stepped In Shit” betray the fact that these guys are total *wave-os*, too, with a few songs that might even be heard on the radio if you fiddled with the dial enough. That’s just fine, because execution is everything, and Ausmuteants can vary it up enough to keep it all exceptionally interesting, brash and fun. Despite a song called “Pissed Myself Twice” that wins this year’s *least-likely-to-be-played-a-second-time* award, the Ausmuteants record’s one I’m pretty sure you’d better hear. (*Aarght Records; aarghtrecords.com*) - Jay



THE AR-KAICS

THE BRATS – “Be A Man/Quaalude Queen” 45

Rick Rivets was a gentleman guitarist present at the creation of loud, slashing swagger-rock, first as a member of the nascent New York Dolls (called Actress in 1971-72), later as a member of various NYC-based long-haired strutters such as The Brats, The Slugs & the Corpse Grinders. I’ve always much enjoyed the brash & ballsy scarf-sashayin’ sound this fella helped to create, which filtered down to the Heartbreakers, and later to the Drake brothers on the west coast and their bands The Joneses, Suicide Kings and Humpers. HoZac’s archival series has resurrected an excellent example of this glammy proto-punk swagger, a remaster of the outstanding 1974 single “Be A Man”, which packs all the masculinity and femininity needed for a three-minute gender-bending rocknroll sex party. The flip, “Quaalude Queen” is a quasi-metallic ode to a trashed-out druggy high school student, and it has all the subtlety and unmistakable class of The Weasels’ “Beat Her With a Rake and Make Her Pay For Her Mistake”. If you enjoy this – and you will – definitely find a way to hear the later and even better Slugs material as well. (*HoZac; hozacrecords.com*) - Jay

BUNNY’S A SWINE – “Calling Out” LP

People have been getting really hot & bothered about the Western Massachusetts scene lately (right around the time I ran away to the West Coast, naturally), but honestly, most of the bands that have been the objects of that fawning aren’t the ones that would

have been my first picks to be the musical ambassadors of the 413 area code. And even though you might run into Kim & Thurston or J. Mascis in coffee shops & record stores around Amherst/Northampton, there’s more going on in the area than bands choosing to rehash the same tired old Dinosaur Youth tropes (although there are plenty of those, too), which is a not-so-subtle nuance that seems to be lost in most of the coverage of the Western Mass underground circa now.

Bunny’s A Swine have been notably absent in a good number of the assessments by outsiders that make Western Mass out to be the next Olympia/Athens/Chapel Hill/whatever other buzz-bin epicenter with a large university that you can think of - maybe it’s because they’ve quietly released all of their records on their own locally-oriented DIY label, or maybe it’s because their ‘90s allegiances (the early Teenbeat Records roster & heavy drinkers from Dayton, Ohio) don’t fit as neatly into a press-generated narrative. If these guys & girl are influenced by any ‘90s Massachusetts exports, they’re the ones from the opposite side of the state - the way that six-string guitarist/vocalist Candace’s airy voice collides with three-string guitarist/vocalist Emerson’s hoarse shout on songs like “Barnburner” & “More Than Enough”, often layered over a steady jangle that gives way to a flurry of fuzz & distortion, would do the Boston shoegaze



CLOTHILDE and Germinal Tenais, 1967 photo courtesy of Born Bad

division led by the Swirlies or Drop Nineteens very proud. Then there's the stompers like "Greetings From the Bottom", where drummer Dustin's manic, pounding drums propel the gloriously ragged, twangy racket (their pretty fucking apt self-descriptor: awk-pop slops-rock), with Candace & Emerson's dueling vocals sounding like the Vaselines fronting vintage Pavement, maybe minus the blatant Swell Maps worship. They might not be getting the same level of attention as some of their neighbors, but of all the Western Mass-spawned bands of late, this is the one whose records I'm most confident will still hold up in ten or fifteen years & if I have to be the one running my mouth off about them until people get it, then so be it. (*Tiny Radars* - tinyradars.net / bunnysaswine.bandcamp.com) – Erika

THE CLITS - "Excuses" 7"EP

My eyes, senses and fears told me femme-centric, screeching political punk, but I decided to play it anyway, and god love 'em, those confounding Clits really threw an Australian-rules curveball with this outstanding minimalist bedroom pop music – with a fella on vocals, no less. Perched halfway between frantic 80s New Jersey pop and an even less cluttered, low-fidelity cassette tape approach, The Clits really have their market cornered. Percussion and bass rule all here, and the songs are sweetly simple and instantly memorable, while resisting all trappings of "fey" and instead coming on strong like something that despite its relative quietness would absolutely pin one to the wall in a live setting. Oh, and like so many of this issue's heroes, they're Australian. I really need to check into those Qantas fares this year. (*Anti-Fade*; antifaderecords.webs.com) - Jay

CLOTHILDE – "French Swinging Mademoiselle 1967" LP/ CD

At some point in the late 1990s I started seeing these "Ultra Chicks" CD compilations of loud, brassy, female-fronted French pop from the 60s, with dayglo mod colors & sleeves with adorable miniskirted chanteuses. Needing a diversion from my typical manly garage-gnarl, I took a flyer on one and was totally hooked, ultimately collecting all five volumes & the "Swinging Mademoiselle" LPs to boot. It was and remains some of the most uptempo, well-recorded big-beat pop music I'd ever heard, and one ultra chick/swinging mademoiselle stood head & shoulders above them all: Clothilde. She only put out two 8-song EPs, but a pal roasted me up a CD-R of those eight songs from a quasi-legit release, and she's still my favorite Frenchy by a goddamn mile.

Born Bad have give Clothilde (real name: Elisabeth Beauvais) the legit release her 8 songs deserved, and they've gone the extra mile and included some Italian versions and even a weird duet I'd never heard, for a total of 11 tracks. Her voice is almost songbird-ish, a bit fragile and coquettish, and yet she comes across as assured, strong and lovely. Then you read the liner notes, which include interviews with her now and with Germinal Tenas, her then-producer – and wow. *She's pissed!* She felt like a manipulated popette, traded on for her looks and presumed charm, and there's probably no doubt that she was exactly that. She then keeps going and indicts the entire French music industry, Tenas, Francois Hardy, all other singers and humanity in general for being so horrible. I'd love to see a fierce and screaming Isabelle Huppert play her in a life story docudrama – she'd totally nail it. Then you come back to her music, with its loopy, sound effect-driven, echoed production wizardry, and

you realize that you're spinning an absolute out-of-time pop masterpiece, on the level with any Joe Meek or Phil Spector production and a better singer (and language) to boot. Highly recommended, in case you couldn't tell. (*Born Bad*; www.bornbadrecords.net) - Jay

COLD BEAT – "Worms" 12"EP

Grass Widow's bass player Hannah Lew lights out for new vistas & ends up returning more or less to home base, with a jaunty couple of numbers that emphasize her cool vocals and half-decade-honed expertise in jagged garage pop. It's right in line with her other band's first couple records, give or take a synthy detour or two. "Worms" is a blissful 1:47 of careening, echoing DIY surf pop w/ some real goddamn pep in its step, and it'll be on every comp tape you make this year. "Year 5772" is harmonic pop with a boatload of icy keyboard just to throw you off your game. Then, inexplicably, on the flip there's a couple of absolutely pointless remixes of each aforementioned song in place of, say, *real* songs - but hey, that's why records have two sides and why you keep one side fresh, and stack your small pets, loose change and weed on the other. (*Crime on the Moon*; midheaven.com/label/crime-on-the-moon) - Jay



COLD BEAT photo courtesy Hannah Lew

BYRON COLEY – "Dating Tips For Touring Bands" LP

I think I speak for the lot of us when I say that this man's memoirs and collected writings are well nigh overdue. Sure, Byron Coley's still very much among us writing about music in that all-knowing, wracked-up wordsmithing style that greatly endeared me to the cut of his jib several decades ago, when he was penning about two thirds of the reviews in *Forced Exposure*, and forevermore. I instantly then called him my favorite "rock critic", and I've really never looked back. A spoken-word LP? I gladly ordered it sound-unheard. "Dating Tips For Touring Bands" is just that, a studio recording of stories, fragments, true tales, false tales, riffs about music and riffs about beer. It's all good. Coley spins a side-long stem-winder about some really awful skunked 1970s beer and it's truly a hoot; it's about how he and a friend became "inventors" in hopes of creating alchemy where there was none to be had. Other bits are about Captain Beefheart;

masturbating to Jayne Mansfield in Playboy; Ken Kesey; Jack Rose; long-ago “punk days” and the like. I’d pay to see it live. His patter sometimes dips into the Meltzer/Tosches/Zap Comix 60s/70s underground crudity that was last edgy around the time it was first calculatingly written to shock, but I laughed anyway, and it’ll be hard for me to school the master. He’s admittedly achieving in the arts where I never started. Definitely try to get this platter of wordage spun for you somewhere if you can, potentially even in your own abode. (**Hot Cars Warp Records; cor-sano.com/merch.html#hotcarswarp**) – Jay

CONSTANT MONGREL – “Heavy Breathing” LP

I was solidly on board for this Australian band’s buzzing 2012 downer-noise debut “Everything Goes Wrong” – especially the stunning “Reflex”, which might’ve been my single favorite track of that year – but with a couple of niggling caveats here & there (mostly a couple of B-minus rather than A-minus tunes), I’d easily call this new one even better. Siltbreeze took this one forward to the people of the world out of the slums of Melbourne, and it’s an inch more brash and guitar-heavy than its predecessor. If I remember correctly, that one ventured into lyrical comic relief at times, whereas this one’s just full pummel and no jokin’, in a dense X/feedtime mode, even a little Bloodloss-like at times minus absolutely any pretention toward skronking, nor “art”. Piss in their pockets all you’d like; they consider that a good thing in Australia. (**Siltbreeze Records; siltbreeze.com**) – Jay

THE COURTNEYS – “The Courtneys” cassette

I feel slightly self conscious about evoking the 1990s so often in reviews, lest you, dear reader, suspect that my critical ear is limited to nostalgia for the Bill Clinton era, but I’ll be damned if it’s not warranted here. The Courtneys are three twenty-something ladies from Vancouver, British Columbia who wear their ‘90s influences on their (flannel) sleeves, with a guitarist/vocalist who has adopted the moniker Courtney Looove, a song paying tribute to everyone’s favorite ‘90s TV show featuring adults posing as Californian teenagers (“90210”, although I’m sure there’s a follow-up about *Saved By the Bell* in the works) & a *Point Break*-referencing musical love letter to Keanu Reeves (no offense y’all, but All Girl Summer Fun Band cornered the market on crush songs for ‘90s alternative heartthrobs about ten years ago with “Jason Lee”). Not surprisingly, the Courtneys have their musical gaze fixed south on Olympia circa 1992 or so, drawing equally from K Records’ naive, minimalist pop & Kill Rock Stars’ strain of primal girl-punk. “Social Anxiety” & “Insufficient Funds” wind themselves around bratty sing-song rhythms lifted straight from the Bratmobile/Heavens to Betsy split 7”, while “Nu Sundae” wipes away the marker-scrawled stomach messages for something closer to the shambling sweetness of Tiger Trap. I’m into it, but then again, I was seven years old in 1992. (**Gnar Tapes/Burger; gnartapes.com / burgerrecords.com**) – Erika

CRUEL SUMMER - self-titled cassette/12” EP

Unlike too many of the participants in the contemporary shoegaze sweepstakes, San Francisco’s Cruel Summer have thankfully remembered to turn their calendar pages after the arrival of *Loveless*. The late ‘80s/early ‘90s 4AD roster seems to be a major touchstone here - the sweet & sour vocal interplay between guitarist Thea Chacamaty & bassist Chani Hawthorne on “Venetian Blinds” & “Silent Star” bears more than a passing resemblance to Kristin Hersh & Tanya Donnelly in their

Throwing Muses days, while their taste in ethereal, chorus-drenched dream-pop guitar tones has Lush written all over it. The formula is more or less consistent across all of the EP’s six tracks - heavily reverbed harmonies, quiet/loud dynamic shifts (Pixies patent pending), Phil Spector by way of Kevin Shields wall of sound atmospherics - which may or may not come dangerously close to turning into a big monochromatic blur of fuzz & shimmer over the course of a full-length. Luckily, this bad boy is over & done in under half an hour & it’s still more interesting than that new My Bloody Valentine record, which is all you can really ask for, right? (**Rocinante/Mt. St. Mtn.; mtstmtm.com/ cruelsummer.bandcamp.com**) - Erika

DREAMSALON – “Thirteen Nights” LP

I have no truck with haters who overwhelmingly rejected Seattle’s Evening Meetings, the post-A-Frames band who dismayed all manner of folks with a dark and moody obtuseness that, alas, I too found a bit too much to handle. It nonetheless grabbed me deep at some gut level. That said, I’m quite happy to have seen that band morph into Dreamsalon this year, if that’s what truly happened, because this record is a hothouse scorcher. On one level, it retains a lot of the grainy, well-considered noise rock you’d have found on Ruthless Records or Homestead in the late 80s - bands like Breaking Circus, Appliances-SFB and even that first almost-entirely unheard Urge Overkill EP. At another level, it rocks like a fucking tidal wave. Song to song, you’re often getting a different band, all cloaked in a dense bass-led stew of buzzing guitar, reverbed-beyond-belief vocals and stepped-up drum repetition. “On The Bus” is “Bela Lugosi’s Dead” meets The Fall’s “Tempo House”, while slashing tracks like “Red Moon” remind you quite well of these guys’ pedigree in jagged and center-facing bands like The Intelligence, the A-Frames, Factums and Love Tan. It’s certainly a different sort of Seattle sound than the one that ruled the 90s, which couldn’t be more distant, dead & buried in the minds and actions of creative folks behind penetrating racket like this. (**Captcha Records; hbsp-2x.com**) - Jay

EASTLINK – “Wild Dog/Blood Money” 45

With these Australian dooper-scuzz minimalists, it’s all about the riff. Heavy, punishing, repetitive riffs where 3 guitarists lock on to something intense and primal for four minutes, and only one guitarist outside of the core unit is allowed to stray into modulated feedback and a different pulsating riff. “Wild Dog” reminds me of Vertigo’s germinal “Two Lives”, one of the late 80s’ most spectacular murders-by-guitar. Eastlink have members of UV Race and Total Control in their ranks, and my sources tell me that these two tracks came from a tape that was making waves last year (“remastered for extra punish”); other tracks from it are soon to be found on additional 45s as well. (**Aarght; aarghtrecords.com**) – Jay

ENDLESS BUMMER – “Ripper Current” 7”EP

Well, there’s their name. There’s that. Otherwise this 45 comes from the dumbo wing of garage punk rock that I typically associate with Big Neck Records and their meaty-handed, pot-bellied ilk. This is why, when one professes enthusiasm for “garage punk” to a sexually desired lady or gentleman, it’s important to carefully explain in minute detail which branch you fork off to. Go someplace quiet if you must. There’s the higher intelligence-quotient fork; you’ll typically find their releases on the likes of S-S, Hozac and, confoundingly, In The Red, who

mistakenly lent their immense credibility to this Neanderthal butt-rock. Then there's the lame drunken majority, often midwestern or Rust Belt in nature, who may employ some "smokin'" riffs (like those of Endless Bummer) but who write songs with lyrics like *"Gimme gimme gimme your treatment/ I need another fix/gimme gimme gimme your treatment/or else I'll end up sick"* (alas, also like Endless Bummer, who write lyrics at the level of Dick and Jane's moronic stepchildren). Often these are rasped like a dying Secretariat minutes before he hit glue factory. You know which fork will get you a kiss at the end of the night, and which fork will have you home alone sleeping with your beer can collection. (*In The Red*; intheredrecords.com) – Jay

EUREKA CALIFORNIA/GOOD GRIEF - split 7"

Transatlantic pop artifact collecting two tracks each from Athens, Georgia's Eureka California & Liverpool, England's Good Grief, released by no fewer than three labels across two continents. Eureka California's supremely catchy, stripped-down guitar/drums racket gives me a nostalgic rush for all of the similarly-minded scrappy indie rock duos that reigned supreme on college radio during my formative years in the mid-'90s & have since been mostly relegated to dusty singles bins in the shadows of the Pavements & Guided By Voices of the world - The Crabs, The Spinanes, Guv'ner, Butterglory... anyone (besides me)? On the flip, Good Grief are clearly well-versed in digging for those same lost gems from Chapel Hill & Olympia, showing some obvious affinity for the vintage era of Superchunk's hyper-enough buzzsaw pop, in particular. A totally shameless '90s throwback, but at least it's fun - all it's missing is an introduction from Matt Pinfield (*Happy Happy Birthday to Me/Rok Lok/Strictly No Capital Letters*) – Erika

THE FIREWORKS – "Runaround" 7"EP

"Runaround" is the sort of song that the 45rpm record was created for – a massively loud rush of two-minute C86-style UK indie pop that stamps itself as a classic the first time it's heard, and forevermore. If you don't think the leadership at Slumberland didn't just agree to sell a testicle for future rights to this band's product, you're dreamin'. "With My Heart" is nearly as meaty, long on feedback and perfect vocals from Isabel Alboil and very short on length. What I don't get is why this band, both here and on their previous single, ever let the dude in the band sing - a ballad no less! - when you know that you, me and everyone else wants to hear Isabel rip through another 90-second candy blast. Free Isabel! Liberate Fireworks! (*Shelflife Records*; shelflife.com) - Jay

FRAU - self-titled demo cassette

The UK is totally booming right now with young bands starting their own teenage riot (grrr!) & this eight song, ten minute-long(!) demo might be the leanest, meanest & fiercest offering from the highly cross-pollinated contemporary English DIY scene devoted to reviving the glory days of Slampt Records & Kill Rock Stars - members of Frau also spread the gospel with like-minded revolutionaries Good Throb & Woolf. Vocalist Ash spits out her lines in sharp, sloganeering bursts over the blown-out, bare-bones punk messthetic kicked up by Paula (drums), Colette (guitar) & Nùria (bass) as they hurtle toward the finish line, leaving the songs bloodied & bruised at their feet after about a minute or so each. The wiry guitar & yelping vocals

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"G. Green are Sacramento, CA's Old Style to Columbus, OH's Yuengling, as they jam in a similarly loose and ramshackle fashion as that of Guinea Worms and Psandwich and Psychedelic Horseshit, et al. They're like the Northern CA equivalent of that Columbus basement-anthem sound..."
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"RECOMMENDED..."

- Doug Mosurock (6/10/13) [edition of 300]

NEGRO SPIRITUALS "Black Garden"/"Ancient Trees" 7" (AWC-001)

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- Byron Coley/The Wire (June 2013) [edition of 47 (11)]

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THE FIREWORKS

on "Safety Instructions" sound like L.A. teenage girl-punks Mika Miko transported across the pond & when Ash shrieks to be heard over the pounding, piercing lo-fi fury of tracks like "Hostile" & "Trouble", you know that you best not fuck with these ladies because Frau will certainly cut your ass down - they're taking the sentiments behind "Rebel Girl", that feminist punk anthem of yore, to new extremes. Hell yeah! (**Tuff Enuff; riotsnotdiets.bandcamp.com/album/frau-demo**) - Erika

FREELove FENNER – "Do Not Affect a Breezy Manner" LP/CD

This high-gloss, abstract pop from Montreal trio Freelove Fenner snuck up on me last year on the "Pineapple Hair" EP and continues its winning ways on their debut LP. They namecheck Cleaners From Venus and Guided By Voices in their materials, but I hear something more icy and distant in their clean tones and heavily reverbed female vocals, something wet and cold and English and early 80s. I could have used a little more dirt and less sheen on this one, but it's a really beguiling mix of short, <3-minute songs that lean heavily on keyboard, wiry guitar and left-of-center construction. In fact it's probably that sheen that lends it its enveloping feel and makes it so "album-like", the way albums used to be made w/ careful thought given to both sequencing and atmosphere. They've made something that I reckon'll hold up for a couple generations or three. (**Fixture Records; fixturerecords.bandcamp.com**) - Jay

HACKAMORE BRICK – "Oh! Those Sweet Bananas/ Someone You Know" 45

The folks at Ugly Pop who put this out took a bright idea from many of our personal mental card decks by giving the glorious "Oh! Those Sweet Bananas" the A-side, 45rpm treatment it deserved way back in 1970 when it was just another song on Hackamore Brick's one and only LP. Though I understand the band swears up and down it's not the case, this song's probably

the first great Velvet Underground rip-off and still one of the finest of all time, keeping the title warm for two years until the Modern Lovers' first album was recorded. Warm, LP-fidelity vocals; a spritely guitar line right out of the *White Light/White Heat* playbook; and a perfect distillation of three-minute, FM-radio friendly perfection makes one cry in historical pain: "Why wasn't this song massive???" Could it have been the title? Or the way vocalist Chick Newman as to alter his pronunciation of the word "vegetables" ("ve-ge-TAB-les") just so it'll fit the cadence of the line he's penned? It's one of the greats, and always a mystery. The flip is an alternate version of one of the lesser, more folky songs on the LP, keeping in line with the 70s custom of casting the B-side to the wolves. (**Ugly Pop; uglypop.bigcartel.com**) - Jay

JOANNA GRUESOME – "Weird Sister" LP/CD

This twee noisegasm was initially quite confounding for me, because swear to god I thought it was Veronica Falls performing under a different name for no apparent purpose – because often on this disc it's the same band, folks – *the same goddamn band*. This is relayed with respect and even a little awe, because when it comes to fresh-faced noise pop, Veronica Falls are as stellar as they come. After my indifference to their earlier stuff, Cardiff-based Joanna Gruesome are now a close second or third, and "Weird Sister" is teacake for teacake in a league with "Waiting for Something To Happen". Singer Alana McArdle hits mellifluous registers on a par w/ My Bloody Valentine's and Lush's female vocalists, yet her band punks things up considerably more than the aforementioned, and often descend into molten guitar chaos as the spirit moves. Picks for your next mixtape are "Wussy Void" and "Anti-Parent Cowboy Killers", but you'll do yourself favors by seeing this one through to the finish, all thirty minutes of it. (**Slumberland; slumberlandrecords.com**) – Jay

JUNIPER RISING – “Juniper Rising” cassette (Burger) & “Days of Heaven” 7” (307 Knox)

Holly (vocals/guitar) & Diana (drums) were two-thirds of NYC’s now-defunct American Sun, who occupied a more punk-informed corner of the same garage as Juniper Rising (except theirs was the one with all of the Dead Moon records). Here, they’ve traded in most of that raw grit to put their own spin on country & western music for the city’s dark alleys & filthy gutters, inspired as much by Dolly & Tammy as it is by the psychedelic nuggets of the ‘60s & the giddy, primitive pop of bands like the Pastels. There’s enough echo-drenched harmonies & Phil Spector drumbeats to satisfy the neo-girl group worshippers, with the addition of some spaghetti western guitar & enough pedal steel to make you cry some serious tears into your beer. On their five-song Burger cassette, the haunting & high lonesome shimmer-pop of “Daydream for a Friend” occupies the same spiritual plane as the Shop Assistants’ cover of “Train From Kansas City”, while the minimal, tom-heavy drums & twangy, reverbed guitar on “Running Through the Wildwood” could almost be from Beat Happening’s darker Cramps-indebted period if it weren’t for Holly’s lovely vocals descended from Patsy Cline. The *Days of Heaven* single has a much more psychedelic acid-country haze to it - “Cowgirl Canyon” pairs galloping drums with some far-out guitar fuzz & swirl that should immediately conjure images in your mind of fringed-jacket garage rockers playing in front of garishly-colored geometric op-art patterns (and that’s a good thing). As a born-Texan, I’m even willing to let it slide that they’re doing all of this honky-tonking from Brooklyn, of all places. (**Burger Records; burgerrecords.com/307 Knox Records; 307knoxrecords.bigcartel.com**) - Erika

LA LUZ – “It’s Alive” LP

These ladies are certainly getting a lot of mileage out of “Sure As Spring” & “Call Me in the Day” - the latter makes its THIRD appearance on a La Luz release in the span of about a year

(thanks to this debut LP, their *Damp Face* cassette EP on Burger Records & a 7” single on Water Wing), while the former is also reprised from the EP (admittedly, as a slightly different recording of the song, but c’mon). If you’re late to the party, Seattle’s La Luz have mastered the art of heartbreaking & haunting beach blanket bingo anthems, especially if the beach in question is located somewhere in Twin Peaks with the ghosts of crackly ‘50s doo-wop & ‘60s girl-group singles echoing from someone’s AM radio. It’s a decidedly Pacific Northwest strain of surf-rock, suited more for chilly late night strolls under moonlit grey skies than any sort of California dreamin’.

“You Can Never Know” & “What Good Am I?” are melancholy organ & tremelo-drenched slowburners in the Mazzy Star/Slumber Party vein, while the jangling “Sure As Spring” features a doom & gloom girl-group chorus lamenting “When you were mine, I never had the time & now I kind of want to die”, channeling the spirit of The Shangri-Las’ “Remember (Walking In The Sand)”, if the Weiss & Ganser sisters had been armed with guitars that they could shake like Dick Dale. Take the two previously-released tracks, throw in two twangy straight-ahead surf instrumentals that won’t knock your socks off if you already own a Shadowy Men on a Shadowy Planet record & you’re just about halfway through the eleven songs on *It’s Alive*. If they get around to putting together another *Girls in the Garage* compilation in thirty years, La Luz should make the cut - I just hope the fact that they’ve been recycling their songs so quickly doesn’t mean that they’ve already run out of ideas. (**Hardly Art; hardlyart.com**) – Erika

LIFE STINKS – “Shadow on the Wall/Drag You” 45

With a name like Life Stinks, it’s clear that someone’s done their proto-punk homework, and this new San Francisco act have an exceptionally winning take on disaffected, gnarly, lowbrow punk rock. It’s a clear thirty year leap forward from the sort of drugged and near-homeless bands who used to stalk SF’s



JUNIPER RISING photo by Dylan Johnson

once-scummy streets in the early 80s: Flipper, Chrome, Fang, Tales of Terror and The Lewd. In keeping with their Ubu-esque name and song titles, though, these guys aren't slipshod junkie hardcore nor experimental plodders. It's a simple formula, really: medium tempos, just-got-punched vocals, maxed guitars, a generally dark mood construction and a handful of moves lovingly and respectfully swiped from the KBD songbook. That's the sort of well-executed negative mental attitude that makes me wanna stand and salute. (**Total Punk; totalpunkrecords.tumblr.com**) – Jay

LIFE STINKS – “Life Stinks” LP/CD

This record's level of quality is as schizophrenic as my reaction to it. On one hand, Life Stinks continue the fetching precedent set by their 45. There are two long numbers in particular – a brutarian 7:09 thud-plodder called “Your Face is a Mess” and an outstanding (and very deliberate) “Sister Ray” rip-off called “My My My”, clocking in at sixteen big minutes – that will give any fan of the dark garage punk rock musical arts pause to celebrate. Parts of this, such as “Endless Drag”, even have the excellent you-can't-win feel of the Cheater Slicks' “Forgive Thee”, and still others include a bit of skronking sax or a buzzing hum of organ that add a lot of sizzle to what's normally a straight-up piece of tough, grizzled steak. What's not to like, right? Well, I can't stomach the ultra-douchey vocals and lyrics that crop up on at least four of these seven tracks. There's a song about how sharp a particular female looks when she's (presumably) giving the vocalist head, and a lot of “*bay-buh!*”-style meathead histrionics that are flat-out absurd. I played this CD for the first time in my car on the way to their record release show, and turned the car around on the way there, knowing that seeing it in person would try my patience no end. Take that as you will, as your vocal/lyric pain threshold may vary; I still think this as promising a “punk” record my hometown of San Francisco has produced in years, and I'll continue to root this crew on if they can just reel in the doofus knuckle-dragging at bit. (**S-S Records; s-srecords.com**) - Jay

NEO BOYS – “Sooner or Later” 2xLP

Nothing has changed/everything has changed since the brief five years that the Neo Boys existed from 1978 to 1983. Over two decades after four ladies in Portland, Oregon came together to make their own simultaneously uncertain & powerfully confident noise, women of the underground are still struggling to be recognized as equals with their male peers & the act of a girl picking up a guitar or a pair of drumsticks or a microphone is still a revolutionary act. Like their contemporaries the Wipers or the Rats (with the pre-Dead Moon Fred & Toody Cole), the Neo Boys' approach to punk was one deeply rooted in the frustrations & nihilism bred in an era when Portland (and the Pacific Northwest in general) was still a fucked-up cultural backwoods; a place where it was up to the girls, queers, weirdos & freaks to channel their alienation into creating their own brand of smart & uncompromising musical rebellion as a means of escape. In this LP's liner notes, Neo Boys bassist KT Kincaid pays tribute to dozens of women who were crucial figures in the Northwest punk scene of the late '70s/early '80s, but in many ways, the list of their far-from-familiar names stands in contrast to some of the well-known men (the Dils, DOA, the Wipers, et al) billed on the show flyers & posters reproduced inside the gatefold sleeve, in case anyone needs more evidence that reissues like this one are vital, necessary corrections of past oversights that have denied

so many brave women noisemakers their due.

This anthology collects both of the Neo Boys' proper releases (their self-titled 7" from 1980 & the *Crumbling Myths* EP from 1982) with a treasure trove of demo recordings, live tracks & other sonic ephemera previously at risk of being lost to the ages. You can literally hear their musical evolution, not just from the punk era to the post-punk era, but also the transformation of their endearingly shaky & hesitant playing into boldly coloring outside of the lines, rejecting more rigid punk conformity in their creation of a blueprint for countless feminist punks of the future (see: the before & after versions of stone-cold '80s underground classic “Never Comes Down”). It's no coincidence that modern torchbearers Grass Widow covered the Neo Boys “Time Keeps Time” side-by-side with Wire's “Mannequin” on a recent single - hopefully this sprawling retrospective will make the Neo Boys an equally recognizable name in discriminating post-punk households, because it's long overdue. (**K/ Mississippi – kreccs.com**) - Erika

NEONATES – “Neonates” digital album

Like you, I gravitated toward punk rock music many years ago because the *anyone can do it* aesthetic was so inclusive and appealing that even a dope like me could pretend to sing in a punk band. Every now and again, however, a singer comes around whose unorthodox vocals forces you into a soul-wrenching crisis of faith, bringing you to your knees to agonizingly question every fiber and tenant of your belief in this inclusive creed. Mary from Neonates is just such a thought-provoker. You'll need to spend a little quality time with her and her band in order to adjust, and I recommend you do so. This Los Angeles trio travels a backward road to 1981 Danceteria-era New York City, where the Bush Tetras, ESG and The Contortions traversed the boundaries of funky minimalism, all punctuated by Mary's yips and yelps and monotone delivery. The band play a spastic but effortless sort of art-thump that sounds both well-crafted and totally nonchalant, and I'd imagine that with the right sort of refreshments, they'd be a hoot live. (**neonates.bandcamp.com**) – Jay

NEW SOUND OF NUMBERS – “Invisible Magnetic” LP

New Sound of Numbers are resurrecting the ghosts of the Athens, Georgia post-punk scene that were largely buried in the public consciousness thanks to thousands of sensitive white boys with jangly guitars who listened to *Murmur* a few times too many - pull out those Oh-OK & Method Actors records, everyone! You can trace their influences from the raw, untamed female energy of the Slits & the scratchy kitchen sink post-punk experimentalism of the Raincoats, to the modern sound of Athens in the technicolor psychedelic soundscapes favored by the weirder branches of the Elephant 6 family tree (from which they've borrowed a few band members). Multi-instrumentalist/vocalist Hannah Jones is a student of the Mark E. Smith school of repetition, repetition, repetition, chanting her lyrics over & over to form the rhythmic heart of songs like “New Dance” & “Complete”, although I doubt the esteemed MES would tolerate so much trumpet, glockenspiel & clarinet in the mix. One minute, they're layering multiple female voices (including Vanessa Briscoe Hay of Pylon!) into the sort of striking, slightly off-kilter harmonies that Grass Widow have updated from their post-punk godmothers & the next, they're knee-deep in a straight-out-of-Stereolab motorik beat filtered through the busy electronic psychedelia of '60s combo the United States of

America. There's so much going on in these songs that they might not make too much of an impression if you're preoccupied with boiling water so you can make some tea, or trying to sneak a listen on the shop stereo between customers at your dead-end retail job (guilty as charged), or whatever - the bewitching charms of New Sound of Numbers' jagged wobble & kaleidoscopic sprawl demand your full attention, if you're willing to give it. (**Cloud;** cloudrecordings.com) - Erika

THE NOTS – “The Nots” 7”EP

Excellent female trio from Memphis who storm out of the runners with a first record that's full-on controlled chaos, appealing equally to uncouth garage punk scumbags and fans of a more “refined” sort of speedy, sputtering, shout-sung girl punk. You get the sense that with a little less vocal histrionics that the Nots might have recorded something a little more “lasting” for the ages, but each of the 4 songs has a terrific anti-sheen of low-fidelity murk, off-to-the-races tempo and ringing chug guitar that slots in cleanly with, say, the Myelin Sheaths and some crazed UK stuff from the 90s – Golden Starlet, International Strike Force *et al.* It got me intrigued enough to watch a couple live videos of the band in action in 2012, and I have to say that *that* band was far more cool and clean in their approach to rocking the garage. Should be interesting to see which incarnation shows up next record. (**Goner Records;** goner-records.com) - Jay

NUMB BATS/PETTY THINGS – “Numb Things” split cassette/download

Numb Bats are a wiry, compelling & brand-new female-fronted Tempe, Arizona band, totally in league with Flying Nun-style Velvets jangle and much of Barbara Manning's work w/ World of Pooh, removed of most traces of sheen and left with a pleasant lo-fidelity and left-of-center candy core, particularly on the excellent “Dr. Five”. Their other number on this little tape, “Angry Woman”, is a sparse and hollow surf number with dirgy no-wave elements, and I swear to god, it sounds like the band's about sixteen years old. Petty Things aren't half bad either – like a beaned-up Voidoids locked in a reverb chamber and told to write three songs about cars and girls. My 1980s associations w/ the Phoenix underground still has me cringing from phantasmal visions of the Feederz and Mighty Sphinxter, so it's more than pleasant to hear a couple of young movers from the desert played fuzzed-out pop so well while playing against type. (**Rubber Brother;** rubberbrotherrecords.com) – Jay

PAMPERS – “Pampers” LP/CD

One of the more satisfying bursts of blown-out sonic ear-squall this year has been the debut LP from NYC's Pampers, who come on blitzing and almost comically intense, like a modern piss-take on “Toolin' For a Warm Teabag”-era Dwarves, either totally serious or with tongues lolling in cheeks. Some of the record sounds like it was recorded inside of the Hadron supercollider, laden as it is with echoes and distortion that cuts to ribbons most of their garage-minded brethren. At times they veer off into something that approaches “Texas Flashbacks”-style psychedelia, just amped up so goddamn loud and way past bleeding that it both kills the hippies *and* erases all memories of the 60s entirely. Those of you looking for something annihilating will find yourselves a pretty special punk rock platter right here. As Homestead Records once put it in ad, this is some real “*sump pump mump gump that'll burst yr diz*”. (**In The Red;** intheredrecords.com) – Jay



THE NOTS photo by BullyRook

PREFAB MESSIAHS – “Devolver” cassette/download

The Prefab Messiahs were recently jacked up out of the early 80s soil of obscurities and given some proper posthumous hosannas thanks to an earlier vinyl EP. I missed all the hoo-hah about them – that is, assuming there was some - until this new 27-song cassette and download that “Burger Records” recently put out. Once again, I'm pleased and chagrined to find that the fount of excellent undiscovered music remains greased and wet. These guys stalked Worcester, MA from 1981-83, and spoke an indigenous language that may have been informed in parts by The Fall, the Television Personalities, the Beau Brummels and the Zombies. Not much consistency in terms of tone or style – there's ringing avant-pop, absurd experimentation, straight-ahead garage rock and a little live-in-concert wanking. “Beyond All That” and a couple of the live numbers use that same squeaking keyboard contraption The Fall used in “Look, Know” to keep time (“*the Vitamin B glandular program*” – you remember, right?), and the whole effect of that and the rest is of a band having a blast, and at comfort with the knowledge that they were probably the most clued-in, musically-informed kids in town. And get this – thirty years later bandleader Kris Thompson and others are giving the Messiahs another go, with releases coming up in 2014. Here's where you get yourself prepared and ready for that one. (**Burger Records;** burgerrecords.org) - Jay

PRIESTS – “Tape Two” cassette (show-only)

It's as if every bit of creative muscle that Priests threw into their monster 45 “Radiation/Personal Planes” was extracted, bleeding & raw, on the operating table when it came time for the next idea. “Tape Two” is a milquetoast version of that record's caterwauling no-wave racket, with enough blood sucked to transfuse that entire Uruguayan rugby team that crashed into the Andes. We're left with a particularly annoying set of vocal performances, an aimless reverbed indie-noise backdrop, and some “*Amerikkka is built on lies!*” rhetoric that gets all lathered up over the fact that white men



ROACHCLIP

who owned land wrote the Constitution 230 some-odd years ago. Let me tell you, when the real revolution comes, the makers of this tape will be aggressively frog-marched in front of the subcomandante to answer for this marked dive in quality from their awesome 45. Let's hope that Priests are busy readying their defense now. (priests.bandcamp.com) – Jay

ROACHCLIP – “Discovery Park” LP

If you dream it, sometimes you can even realize it – and if you've ever wondered what the long-awaited Modern Lovers/Desperate Bicycles hybrid might sound like, you might want to take a gander at Roachclip. As far as I've been able to gather, they're a collective from Detroit who've been with us a few years but just got around to releasing their first long-form vinyl. I'm pretty floored by the thing, as it's not only an amalgamation of many of your & my most-treasured things, it's also got this great spaced-out dooper sheen that often reminds me of the first Royal Trux album, plus the addition of a rollicking, almost broken-sounding circus-style organ that heaves & wheezes and adds a near-infinite amount of glee to what's already a fantastic collection of songs. Without getting all smarmy about it, it's phenomenal unearthings like this from the American underground that permit me and other seekers of truth to keep the faith and wave the flag of freakdom. Gotta hope that this is the first of many Roachclip LP transmissions from deepest Detroit. ([All Gone; allgone.bigcartel.com](http://AllGone.bigcartel.com)) - Jay

RUBY PINS – “Ruby Pins” LP/download

As a card-carrying early-days Grass Widow fan, I'm happy to welcome them into their next life phase: the solo years. Kiss did it. Roxy Music did it. The Who did it. Me, I'm just glad Grass Widow's still around; they've already outlived the typical

months-long lifespan of most decent and non-decent bands; and if they need a breather to find their way back to themselves, then so be it, right? A more-than-tangential benefit is this excellent record from drummer Lillian Maring, one of my faves this past year. It's pretty much “solo” in every sense of the word, except for those other folks that occasionally pop up to lend a hammer or a dozen eggs every couple of tracks. Ms. Maring claims Brian Eno as a muse for this set of quasi-experimental bedroom pop and artful hard rock. I'll see her Eno, and raise her a Peter Dinklage (“My Friends Are Insane” – top 10 song of the year), a Sic Alps (“Lost Art”) and half a fragment of that Sentridoh cassette that's collecting dust in my garage. Maring plays guitar, she plays bass and she drums – sometimes programming them electronically as well. The result is something every bit as good as the last two Grass Widow records, and you and I both know that's most excellent. ([M'Ladys Records; mladys.bandcamp.com](http://MLadysRecords.mladys.bandcamp.com)) - Jay

SEPTEMBER GIRLS – “Heartbeats/Wasted” 45

September Girls are an all-female Irish band who showed a flash of promise on an early EP that's delivered on this 45. “Heartbeats” has the sort of wash-of-sound approach to hooky pop music that might qualify it as a mildly psych-ridden indie version of The Mamas and the Papas, loaded with harmonies, multiple angles of jangle, and other things nice. “Wasted” is by contrast a slow burner, with a dark underbelly of bass rumbling, and a pace that's none too quick to the finish line but that stamps a memorable chorus onto your cranium for at least an hour or two after each listen. This apparently is just the precursor to a full album, so we'll have to see if the flight to top-tier quality holds. ([Fortuna Pop; fortunapop.com](http://FortunaPop.fortunapop.com)) - Jay

SEX TIDE “Flash Fuck” LP

Very quickly this trio has inherited the mantle for Ohio obfuscation from the recently-deceased Times New Viking, and Sex Tide’s racket is as noisy and jarring as those early ones were from TNV. That said, the drummer/singer-led Sex Tide unearths many markers of very high quality – the shambling fuzz-command of The Scientists; the thudding 60s riffs of Pussy Galore; and a general loose-limbed aesthetic that comes either from lack of sleep, lack of practice or a studied improvisational nonchalance. I’m all over it. The aforementioned drummer/singer is *Aurelie*, a name designed to conjure up just the sort of earworm niceties that are everything this record’s not. It might not be pretty but it’s an excellent bolt from the Ohio blue, and one of the best things I’ve heard this year and then some. (**A Wicked Company**; awickedcompanyrecords.bandcamp.com) - Jay

SHOCKED MINDS – “Shocked Minds” LP

8pm, Rodney’s on the air, beating off in Joan Jett’s hair. What else is Rodney doing? He’s probably playing this thing, a resplendently faithful and even occasionally entertaining ROQ tribute record that falls somewhere between the Adolescents’ “Amoeba” and Ill Repute’s “Clean Cut American Kid”. Not sure what Brook Shields is thinking – probably that these guys are *weird*. (**HoZac**; hozacrecords.com) - Jay

SIC ALPS – “She’s On Top” 12”EP

Maybe you too were half-wondering every time these guys put a record out, which was pretty goddamn often, “*Hey, just when are Sic Alps going to hang it up?*” Not that I wanted them to or anything. While I think they peaked about mid-career with 2008’s “U.S. EZ”, I was also rather enjoying their move toward more accessible, fuzzed pop fare away from atonal song fragments & half-assed experiments. Well, they hung it up anyway, and this three-song Drag City EP was their swan song. Now look what you made them do.

It’s a decent enough way to go out, albeit with lone founder Mike Donovan as the only surviving member after a Spinal Tap-esque rotating support cast. Donovan’s vocals & guitar were always the main draw in any case; he always sounded to me like he was very successfully channeling both Neil Haggerty & Mark Bolan, as he does on the title track, a chunky piece of heavy electric wizard boogie. “Carrie Jean” sounds like an uncompleted bubblegum metal section of a 70s song cycle and is fairly dismissible, but all is fully redeemed on “Biz Bag”, a true corker of molten pop badassery, big & hard & loud like Grand Funk Railroad inhabited by the ghost of Royal Trux. As with any prolific indie band, I’ve have rather remembered these guys for one great record or five great songs rather than for eight years of weeding & choosing, but hey, at least there were many weeds from which to cull. (**Drag City**; dragcity.com) - Jay

SKINNY GIRL DIET/ETHICAL DEBATING SOCIETY - split 7”

On principle, I refuse to use the term “riot grrrl” to describe anything unleashed into the world after the era when Bikini Kill roamed the earth, but these two bands of upstarts from London are conjuring the sound of the

modern boy-girl revolution that seems to be flourishing right now in the UK (just don’t call it riot grrrl). Delilah (guitar/vocals), Ursula (drums/vocals) & Amelia (bass/vocals) of Skinny Girl Diet are all apparently “school-age”, which one can only assume means the School of Slamp Records - their lo-fi, ramshackle brat-punk would fit in perfectly with the likes of International Strike Force or Golden Starlet. On their side of the split, “DMT” twists clattering drums, fuzzed out garage-trash guitar & echo chamber vocals into the sort of wiry punk rager that brings to mind teenage girl-punks of yesteryear Skinned Teen, while “Homesick” speeds up & slows down with reckless abandon as the gang vocals weave in & out, alternating between a deadpan monotone & throat-shredding shriek. On the flip, Ethical Debating Society take the rough with the smooch, drawing similar inspiration from the youth underground revolution anthems of Huggy Bear & Nation of Ulysses - all dual-guitar/no bass suckerpunches & incendiary coded vocals shouting “COME ON!” or “RIGHT NOW!”. Kris & Tegan’s urgent call-and-response vocals on “Child’s Play” & “Creosote Ideas” pass the Red Monkey test with flying colors, toning down that (woefully underappreciated) band’s post-punk angularity for basic raw anger. Totally righteous! (**Happy Happy Birthday to Me**; hhbhm.com) - Erika

SKINNY GIRL DIET “Skinny Girl Diet” EP

Try and Google anything about this band, or search for their stuff on Tumblr, and you’ll be forced to wade through all manner of disgusting anorexia-positive web sites and blogs. You and I already have those bookmarked, right? Eventually, you’ll find this happening trio of London-based women who market themselves as a “fierce girl gang”. Half the time, they’re almost just that. “Dimethyltryptamine” is a wonderfully enveloping, lo-fidelity psych/garage-pop number that reminds me of the good songs by Georgia’s unfortunately-named Tunabunny. I’d be happy to call it a 2013 year-end list-topper. Then there’s “Eyes That Paralyze”, which has all the *good* hallmarks of quintessential 90s small-label riot grrl bass-driven punk rock throb, with none of the bad. Then

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there's a fast-n-grungy one with screaming, and another one that I've already forgotten, but this download-only 4-songer was most certainly a well-spent \$3.96. (**Fiasco Recordings; downloadable on iTunes, Google Play etc.**) – Jay

THE SLEAZE – “Tecktonik Girlz” 12”EP

When the Killed By Death and Bloodstains comps of early American punk starting arriving in 1989, I was so head-over-heels berserk for the stuff that some pals of mine formed a short-lived, practice-only punk rock cover band and called it The Hinmen. What's lasted for me 25 years later, outside of the classics of course, are some of the more demented vocal performances. Something about an ignoramus, ranting-in-a rubber-room gonzoid vocal style really lends itself to 2-chord punk, and some of my lunatic heroes include The Panics (“I Wanna Kill My Mom”); the Mentally Ill (“Gacy's Place”, “Tumor Boy”) and Freestone (“Bummer Bitch”), each of whom featured a vocalist seemingly one stumble from the wrong side of sanity.

Meet The Sleaze. They're from Minneapolis, and they're from now. They may not quite have the finely-honed developmentally delayed chops that the aforementioned do, but they're pretty phenomenal in their way. No chance that singer Conor O'Brien hasn't dutifully ingested 35 years of punk rock education in the way that he moronically and beautifully bleats, sheep-like, into the mic, but hang me if he isn't the best singer on the planet in 2014. This EP is a lovely slap in the face – righteous, classic, KBD-style punk, recorded way on the cheap and mixed into bleeding on extra wide 45rpm grooves. Everything about the record, from the omnipresent sneer in O'Brien's voice to the stamped stark-white covers, just *screams* quality. You'd be missing out on a real pantsload of excitement by passing it by. (**Total Punk; floridasdying.com**) – Jay

SOURPATCH – “You Knew” 45

Two short & sweet crushworthy pop songs for part-time punks brought to you by the Sourpatch kids, who have essentially built up a mini-empire of countless projects in San Jose, California spreading the gospel of sugar-coated my-so-called-'90s sounds. A-side “You Knew” is a scrappy, rough & tumble jangler in the Blake Babies/Velocity Girl mold that pulls off the neat trick of getting three minutes of mileage out of a simple boy/girl “ahhhh ahhhh ahhhh” harmony. On the flip, “Let's Get Educated” mixes airy female call & response vocals with a gentler strum & shuffle - they're still under the guidance of Rose Melberg, patron saint of indie-pop, except this time they're more fixated on the Softies than the Go Sailor/Tiger Trap-praising “You Knew”.

All y'all pop kids might have to channel your inner Nancy Drew to get your hands on a copy, as it's part of a series of singles put out by an English label with each edition limited to 777 copies, of which only 77 are available individually outside of the subscription. Or you can grab it digitally from the WIAIWYA Bandcamp page & save yourself a minor headache. Either way, it's worth it, so choose your own adventure! (**Where It's At Is Where You Are; wiaiwya-777777.blogspot.com/sourpatch.bandcamp.com**) – Erika

SPRAY PAINT – “Rodeo Songs” LP/CD

Far more pleasing second effort from Austin's Spray Paint, who over the course of two 2011-12 45s were the most nails-on, jarring artpunk band on the planet, yet who lost their head of

steam when it came time to put out a full record about a year ago. “Rodeo Songs” is more like it (and more like those singles), an across-the-board solid collection that blends elements of The Cramps' “Human Fly”, Rema Rema, and other metallic postpunk bad feeling from the cluttered junkyards & dead zones of central Texas. Their world is one in which creeps and burnouts lurk within your neighborhood and perhaps even your gene pool, where drug deals go bad and where it's probably a real fine idea to stay indoors for the night. The only thing I find a bit of a bum note in Spray Paint's attack is their insistence on having two of their three members sing/speak every line in unison on most tracks. Something about this dual vocal approach nearly comes off as Texas cornpone comedy, which has a way of often undercutting the decidedly intense, swirl-of-madness musical vibe, yet it's also one of those things that I find I'm warming to with every spin of the platter & which makes these guys one of the nation's more unique and innovative panic rock bands. (**S-S Records; s-srecords.com**) – Jay

STRAPPING FIELDHANDS – “Impossible To Say/Sitting on Her Whiskers” 45

Well how about that? Look who just joined us in the twenty-first century. I'm sure you'd probably relegated these rollicking Philadelphian bards to the 90s consignment heap, but this new 45's a troubadourian return to form, and certainly the least expected & most welcomed of the best-of-2013 singles. Despite some fantastically memorable songs, to my ears the Strapping Fieldhands were too often on the wrong side of wandering minstrel kitsch back then, always with tongues in cheek and sometimes lacking in coherence and execution. Yet “Impossible to Say” is as good as anything they've done: a joyous, short little skiffle that's instantly ingrained upon the brain, ready to be shouted at top volume over the course of many, many beers. The flip's pretty fun as well, an English cowpoke number about a “cute, but hirsute” bearded lady. You'll be seeing the Waterloo sunset in no time. (**Richie Records/TestosterTunes; testostertunes.com**) – Jay

SUN FOOT – “Songs In The Key of R, B & C” LP

Look, if I'm being honest, I'm very happy about the resurgence of vinyl and all the mystery and throwback sentiment that inspires. Yet if records like Sun Foot's are any indication, I'm also going to miss horribly the “try before you buy” smorgasbord of illegal file sharing in equal measure. A reputable mailorder catalog described this Portland wankadoodle as “DIY artpunk” and flatteringly compared it to 100 Flowers. In the recent days of yore I'd have done my homework before rifling through my Paypal account and firing over 20 bills, but this is a limited-edition LP. Even Soulseek doesn't have it, baby! You know why? Not one slob saw fit to digitize this avant-wackjob barefoot improv mess. It sounds *nothing like* 100 Flowers, and if this is “artpunk” then goddamn it, I'm an artpunk. This gasping fart is the sort of dreck that used to come out on home-recorded cassette and get hosanna'ed in rote within the pages Option and Sound Choice as “radical freedom”, then thrown into the bathroom wastebasket when no one was looking. 100 Flowers. My ass. (**Teenage Teardrops/Awesome Vistas; sunfoot.bandcamp.com**) – Jay

TALULAH GOSH – “Was It Just a Dream?” LP/CD

For many years I found it hard to embrace “twee”, and all the baggage that came loaded with it. I've always loved a good harmony and I generally, but certainly not exclusively, prefer

the female voice to the male, despite a published history of fanzines in the 1990s that trended quite *ultra-dudely* in their musical subject matter. Having realized that I'd kinda maxed out on quality male-dominated underground shit-rock of the 50s to the 00s, I started to delve deep into saccharine-sweet pop perhaps ten/fifteen years ago, leading me to a motherlode of 60s ye-ye, American and UK girl-groups and, once I truly felt ready to dip a toe in, the "twee" indie pop bands of the 1980s and beyond, particularly the winsome female-led ones. After a nice start with various common favorites, I discovered Dynamite Hemorrhage contributing editor Erika Elizabeth's "Expressway to Your Skull" online radio show a little over two years ago, and found myself digging in hard to her amazing collection of vinyl obscurities from the likes of the Wilderness Children, the Fat Tulips and others who wielded melody, jangle and feedback like hattori hanzo swords.

Talulah Gosh are probably *the* touchstone group for the aforementioned lost children of the 80s UK underground, and for all their subsequent ilk whom I've mostly scorned and ignored since then. I've come to not just admire the band and their five 45s and one flexi – all of which are collected here, along with demos and live tracks – but to actively enjoy their sunny, buzzsaw, 2-minute pop songs. Not one but two excellent female vocalists, both of whom are guitarists, adorn a backing group that includes yet *another* guitar, which should tell you a bit about their emphasis on galloping tempos and what is sometimes wild, intense screech ("Testcard Girl"). Then there are numbers – I'm talking to *you*, "Bringing Up Baby" – that once heard will pleasantly haunt your inner thoughts and waking life for days afterward. Talulah Gosh deserve they rep they acquired and then some, and the "Was It Just A Dream?" collection is pretty much the be-all and end-all dope you'll need on this band. If you don't dig it, then baby, you just don't dig twee. (**Damaged Goods; damagedgoods.greedbag.com**) - Jay

TERRY MALTS – "Nobody Realizes This Is Nowhere" LP

Hyperactive Buzzcocks-inspired smart-ass pop from three Bay Area boys with the just right amount of snot & some shared preoccupations with their leather jacketed spiritual guides in the Ramones (namely boredom, alienation & girls, in no particular order). For the most part, Terry Malt's cling to the teenage lobotomized punk sneer that runs throughout songs like "Well Adjusted" & "I Was Not There" in three minutes or less, although the feedback-kissed jangle-popper "Comfortably Dumb" tilts closer to "Throw Aggie Off the Bridge" than "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue", while bassist/vocalist Phil Benson's detached monotone on the antisocial lament "Human Race" sounds like Ian Curtis bound & gagged by three chords & a blanket of fuzz - the line "I found sorrow where other people seem to find grace" could have been lifted from the *Unknown Pleasures* journals. I really loved last year's debut LP also on Slumberland (*Killing Time*) & given that they're working within a relatively narrow framework, it's no big surprise that this one's really just more of the same. Mindless, pogo-worthy pop fun is all well & good when it's dished out in these sorts of sub-thirty minute doses, but these dudes should keep in mind that even the Buzzcocks packed it in (at least for awhile) after album number three. (**Slumberland; slumberland.com**) - Erika

TOXIE – "Newgate/Tie" 45

Back in my day we might have called this excellent 45 from Memphis' Toxie "new wave" or "Rock of the 80s", and had it been gone into major rotation on KROQ, The Quake or 91X, no wavoid



TOXIE

would have batted a heavily mascaraed eye. Yet here it is on Eric Oblivian's Goner Records, doing battle for label supremacy with screaming garage punk titans and the like (not entirely fair anymore, as the label has evolved considerably from its snarling 90s roots). Certainly there's a part of me that wonders had this been on some other label – like, say, Elektra/Asylum, Casablanca or Mystic - if I'd have paid it the same considerate and thoughtful attention. Glad I did, because the 45's a jagged, buzzing ride of whooshing keyboards, impact-heavy and shimmering bass and guitar, and a terrific dreamy set of pipes from singer Alexandra Burden, who can pretty much write her own ticket w/ a voice like that. Both tracks conjure a lighters-in-the-air 2AM outdoor festival pigpile of postpunk, dance, garage and C86 pop bands. I'm all in for life if she keeps writing songs like these two top-shelfers. (**Goner Records; gonerrecords.com**) – Jay

TRUE BELIEVERS – "Accept It!" 7"EP

The obscure, "regional" 45 of the early 80s American underground has experienced a much-deserved explosion of cachet, as so many have come to grips with long-forgotten and –buried items of interest vis-à-vis comps like the "Homework" series and sundry posthumous unearthings. Plus, once anyone hears Mike Rep's righteous definitional "protopunk" 70s stuff ("Rocket To Nowhere", "Mama Was a Schitzo" etc.), an immediate rooting interest is established, and you absolutely need to hear *all Rep*. So if you've somehow slept on this 1980 Columbus, OH classic of analog bedroom folk punk from Rep, Tommy Jay, "The General" and Nudge Squidfish and focused only on Rep's titular bands, I encourage you to aggressively seek out this recent reissue 45 on HoZac. It contains the literally and metaphorically chilling short caper "Death By Freezing" (and its genius "chorus", which is an increasingly frantic plea to "*let me out of the meat freezer*"); the rarely-heard "Gusto Hungry", a bleary-eyed barroom folk ditty one drink shy of a football chant; and the keyboard-driven "Accept It!", which might be one of the single greatest songs the heartland has ever produced, on a par with other regional monsters like "The

Medium Was Tedium” and “Motivation Complex”. If someone’s sitting on other True Believers material from this era, it’s well past time to start talking. (*HoZac; hozacrecords.com*) - Jay

TRUE SONS OF THUNDER – “Black Astrologers/I Can See But You Don’t Know” 45

At first I had some trouble settling in with the jarring, shamle-space punk on Side A, and then it hit me: Fuckin’ Flyin’ A-Heads. Or maybe Chain Gang. In any case, “Black Astrologers” travels to bizarro land in order to teleport Memphis garage rock time travelers back to 1980 so they can unlearn their instruments and strip down to something even more crude, unkempt and wholly unpredictable. Love it. B-side “I Can See But You Don’t Know” is more what you might expect from a Memphis rocknroll band containing Eric Goner/Oblivian: rollicking, bouncy, near-soulful garage stomp; apparently a cover of a 1970 band called The Equals, whose sleeve for *their* 45 I just Googled – Jesus, what a fright! (Black guy in a blond wig; all 5 members of the band looking supremely stoned). Inspired stuff across the board. (*Goner Records; goner-records.com*) - Jay

VENOM P. STINGER – “1986-1991” 2xCD

I’d have pegged Venom P. Stinger for a *least-likely-to-be-reissued* award twenty years ago, but as the world’s fascination with the bleary underbelly of the 1980s Aussie underground continues apace, as evidenced by feedtime, Bloodloss and other reissues the past several years, it’s certainly pleasing for me to have all their dark material collected in one neat place. I was, in fact, a huge fan of theirs in their time. I guess having the Dirty Three, who blossomed organically from the ugly cola nut this band coughed up in the late 80s, making music on Drag City these days doesn’t hurt Venom P’s cause either.

This double CD really nails it as well – everything sounds *big* and brain-scrambling, a remastering job to beat the goddamned band. It brings together their first two LPs “Meet My Friend Venom” and “What’s Yours Is Mine” along with their best 45 (“Walking About/26mg”) and a 1991 EP. As far as Dynamite Hemorrhage is concerned, and with all due respect to Siltbreeze and latter-day vocalist Nick Palmer, those are the *only* two LPs of their you need, because anything without maximal throat-scraping vocalist Dugald McKenzie is a different band comprising a wholly different ethos.

Venom P. Stinger played a sort of distorted, angry noise-jazz, driven as much by Jim White’s militaristic snare drumming as by Mick Turner’s scraping guitar. You know it’s one of their songs from note one, because nobody drums like White does outside of Art Blakey or Max Roach and their ilk. That’s not to say this is “jazz”, because that would be silly, wouldn’t it? It’s more like rubber-room panic rock, one branch removed from both Beefheart’s Magic Band and The Birthday Party, played by musos who know what the hell they’re doing and who play faster if not harder than the aforementioned. These guys were actually placed on awful hardcore punk compilations at the time. Dugald McKenzie chews up a hell of a lot of scenery as well with his aggro, very *Aussie* voice and his unrelentingly depressing couplets. He drank himself to death, poor fella; as they say, “he lived as he sang”. Wonderful to have all this stuff digitally restored and improved, and a nice feather in Drag City’s cap for giving it a major push. (*Drag City; dragcity.com*) - Jay

VERONICA FALLS – “Nobody There/Need You Around” 45

Heavy hangs the head that wears the crown, as they say, but as the planet’s finest “indie pop” band, Veronica Falls shows no signs of stumbling just yet. This new 45 was put together in a small edition for an Australia/Japan tour and released by the band themselves. Hey, I know what you’re thinking. “Tour single” = piss-poor demos or throwaways. Nope. “Nobody There” is absolutely 45rpm A-side worthy, a big whooshing surge of hooks and harmony, with a light flash-fry coating of distortion and ringing keyboards. Its flip is another pop winner that showcases singer Roxanne Clifford’s honey-dipped throat; a self-admitted Au Pairs/Kleenex/Raincoats fan, Ms. Clifford sings like a golden lambchild of Vashti Bunyan or Sandy Denny who just happens to have dipped into the harder stuff and can deftly maneuver through feedback and rushed tempos. First-rate stuff, yet again. (*Veronica Falls; veronicafalls.bigcartel.com*) - Jay



VENOM P. STINGER photo by Sarah King

WILDHONEY – “Like Me” 7”EP

Shame on me I guess, but I’m about the last fella you’d want to ask anything about “shoegaze”. I just decided a couple of years ago that there were a few numbers in the My Bloody Valentine back catalog that I enjoyed, and that’s about as far as it goes. That said, if this single from Baltimore’s Wildhoney is shoegaze, then consider my gaze fixed downward. It’s three songs of some *gnarly hardcore shreddin’* ‘gaze – well, two of them anyway – both boisterous and loud and total riffarama pop songs, with that swelling sort of orchestral feedback that they tell me marks a real good ‘gaze number. These are truly ear-bleeding pop songs in the “You’re Living All Over Me” tradition, just with laconic female vocals instead of male ones. Very impressed, and hoping at the core of my being that they’ll all be this good. (*Nostalgium Directive; nostalgiumdirective.com*) - Jay

THE WOOLEN MEN – “Dog Years” LP (*Dog’s Table*) & self-titled LP (*Woodsist*)

Ladies & gentlemen, the best band in Portland, Oregon right now, until someone proves to me otherwise. The Woolen Men

exist in a parallel universe where *Our Band Could Be Your Life* was equally devoted to the American & New Zealand undergrounds of the 1980s, with the nervous & nerdy jangle of the Clean & the Bats existing side-by-side with the Minutemen & Husker Du jamming econo. The (amazing) choice of covers that have popped up on the series of cassettes from which *Dog Years* is compiled provides fairly conclusive evidence that these dudes are truly after my heart (Volcano Suns, the Go-Betweens, the Pin Group, the Flamin' Groovies, the Neo Boys & the aforementioned Minutemen, for starters) - while we don't get any of those Woolen Men reworkings collected on this LP, their off-kilter pop does sound exactly how you would expect a band with such a great record collection to sound.

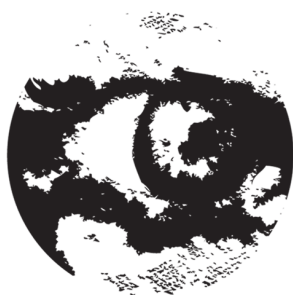
Their self-titled LP on Woodsist is just as great, from the angular, Wire-inspired "Her Careers", to the closest thing to an American adaptation of the Clean's "Tally Ho!" as you'll ever hear ("Head on the Ground"), to "Ode to an Hour", which could realistically pass for a long-lost contribution to one of those late '80s/early '90s Flying Nun compilations like *Tuatara* or *Pink Flying Saucers Over the Southern Alps*. If someone is out there test-marketing bands designed to completely win over anyone who has ever owned well-thumbed copies of the *Trouser Press* record guides or racked up a misspent youth behind the microphone in a college radio station, the Woolen Men are totally scoring off the charts. Don't fight it. (**Woodsist; woolenmen.bandcamp.com/ woodsist.com**) – Erika

ZEBRA HUNT – "Beaches" 7" EP (Manic Pop!) & "Only Way Out" 7" (Tenorio Cotobade)

Two Zebra Hunt singles appearing within the span of less than six months should really be a good thing for all adherents of the international pop underground, but these dudes are seriously

caught in a good luck/bad luck dilemma when it actually comes to getting your hands on one of their damn records (digitally-inclined folks can breathe a little easier). Minnesota-based Manic Pop! Records released the *Beaches* EP back in April, only to effectively drop off the face of the Earth by early June when the label's website & social media pages were shut down without warning. I managed to snag a copy when the band made one of their somewhat-regular trips south from Seattle to Portland, but you could also probably hold out hope for digging one up at a record store where smart, jittery pop doesn't go like hotcakes. And you really should - A-side "Beaches in LA" dispenses with the hyperactive, drunk-on-Flying Nun jangle of their previous digital-via-Bandcamp EP for languid, summery psych-pop, while the the flipside features said digital EP's smash hit in an alternate universe "Half Right", along with "Tomorrow", where they work themselves into a nice Feelies-inspired rave-up.

The second single showed up in August as the first release on the new Tenorio Cotobade label, which, to the dismay of anyone at the mercy of absolutely shit dollar-to-Euro conversion rates, is based in Spain. "Only Way Out" is pure starry-eyed, Dunedin-dreaming magic, backed with the much darker garage-rock sneer of "Get Along", with a great kiss-off line from guitarist/vocalist Robert Mercer ("it doesn't mean I like you, though I put up with your shit") that's up there with the early & still charmingly rough-around-the-edges Go-Betweens classics. This one's honestly worth getting fucked on the international postage charges, y'all. Dear well-established American indie labels: get your shit together & put out a record for this band that people might have a realistic chance of obtaining. (**Tenorio Cotoblade; tenoriocotobade.bandcamp.com / zebrahunt.bandcamp.com**) – Erika



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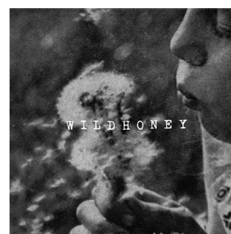
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BOOKS.

All reviews by Jay except as noted

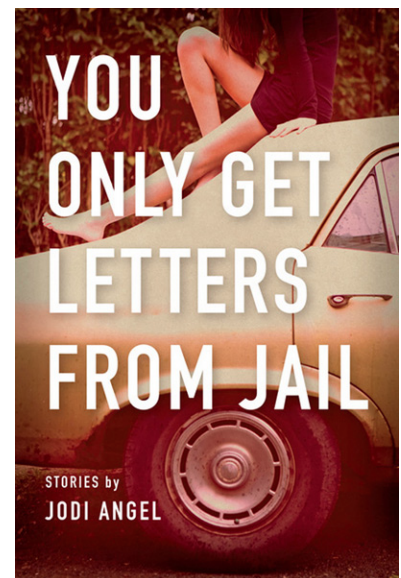
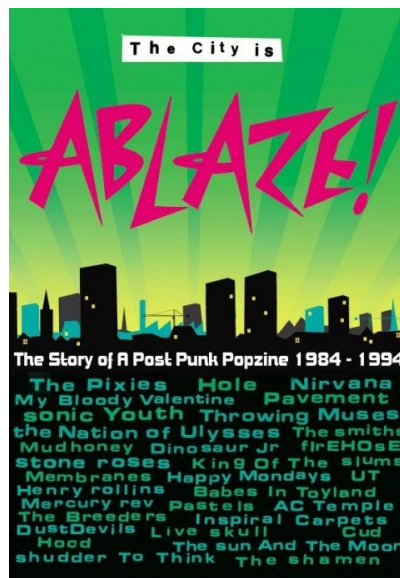
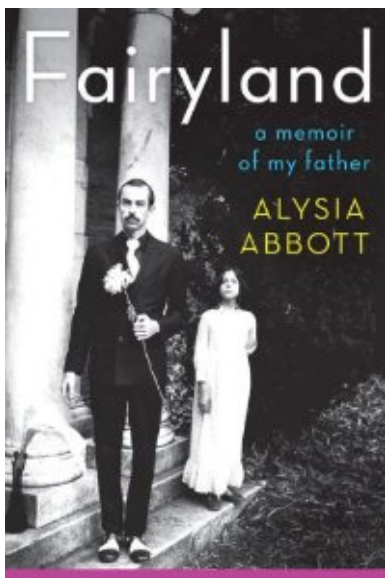
ALYSIA ABBOTT - "Fairyland: A Memoir of My Father"

I moved to San Francisco right out of college in 1989, and was raised in the shadow of it, an hour down the peninsula in San Jose. The City (capital C, of course) was, by the time I was moving in, consumed by an AIDS crisis that was killing young men in the low hundreds every single month. I lived in the Haight-Ashbury, just blocks from where "Fairyland"'s author Alysia Abbott grew up with her gay poet/writer father, Steve Abbott—and where she was caring for him as he died from AIDS as well. It was a weird time. San Francisco is such a gay city, and AIDS activists and organizations and marches and hospice care fundraisers were *everywhere* at that time. The documentary film "We Were Here", which is excellent, tells the story very well. As a non-gay male whose main and almost exclusive interests in the early 90s were rocknroll, record collecting and starting my work career (such as it was, as a customer service rep at Monster Cable), I found the AIDS crisis both easy to ignore and impossible to get away from. I wanted to read Abbott's book to get a better sense of *her* San Francisco, the one I lived in or near for much of the same time, and at the same age (early 20s) – but also because her memoir of growing up in a loose, ever-shifting sort of bohemia with her dad sounded like a terrific ride. It was.

"Fairyland" is a memoir that I recommend to anyone unconditionally. Primarily, Abbott tells an excellent chronological tale of her girlhood, teenage years and young adulthood in a non-maudlin, often self-effacing and extremely loving manner toward her father, who raised her on a wing and a prayer all by himself. Her parents were educated and radical

grad student activists and hippies in Atlanta who married young, lived fast and, in her mother's case, died very young. They married despite her knowledge that her husband-to-be was bisexual and, as it turned out, later to be exclusively gay. In fact, Steve Abbott was radicalized by Stonewall in 1969, so we're talking about someone who was "out and proud" very early, to his credit. Alysia Abbott writes very well, piecing together her father's recollections and journal entries, of her young mother's struggles with her new husband's boyfriends and about the almost monthly personal growth she was undergoing from 60s wild child to somewhat responsible mother.

That said, Alysia Abbott pulls no punches throughout this book on the shortcomings of her parents, and more importantly, those of herself. The pain she feels even writing about her teenage selfishness and her naive/fearful neglect of her lonely and eventually dying father, without her even having to say it, is obviously immense, and she reprints letters that she wrote him that must have been painful to re-read 20 years later, let alone share with the world. It's also clear that she was, on the whole, a wonderful and loving daughter, and the true light of her dad's too-short life. Steve Abbott is painted as a complex but exceptionally good-hearted man, one who was sure of his sexuality and creative calling as a poet/artist/bohemian, yet who struggled with feelings of self-worth and with loneliness. You wonder, as Alysia does, what their life might have been like had her mother Barbara lived. Would it have even been together? Not likely – but it is possible it would have made for a different, but equally good book.



The dissonance of being a gay man raising a daughter in free-swinging, liberated 70s and early 80s San Francisco must have been a minefield. Abbott writes of how jarring it was for her, simultaneously embracing her father's friends and lifestyle while often yearning for the quote-unquote normal childhoods she saw on TV and that she observed in her friends. Think, though, of Steve Abbott's uniqueness as a gay dad, back in a time when no one had a gay dad that they lived with. Marriages would instantly dissolve when one parent came out as gay in the 70s, and the children would almost always be placed with the straight parent. This was not an option in the Abbott household, nor would either of them ever wished for any alternative but the one they were given. Steve Abbott often found himself on the periphery of the gay community, wanting to be more active, to date more, to go out more - and yet wholly devoted to raising his daughter in the best ways he knew how.

The memoir also does a terrific job recounting young Alysia's humorous experiences with many San Francisco-centric touchstones: the poetry readings and internecine warfare amongst the literary set; "The Quake", the new wave/Rock of the 80s station that we both listened to in the Men Without Hats era; the gay scene in the Castro and at Café Flore; and the dawn of grunge in the Haight, with gutter punks, skinheads and street kids and late nights at the I-Beam and Nightbreak. *That* I myself was very much present for. I even drove past her old place at 545 Ashbury the other day while in the midst of reading the book, to get a better frame of reference for her San Francisco – wow. Regardless of her father's sexuality and their life circumstances, there's little doubt that her childhood would have had major and significant differences from mine in the safety and comfort of suburban Sacramento and San Jose.

It's touching and powerful when you realize toward the middle of the book that the "differently-parented" Alysia Abbott writing the book did *not* have to go through a crucible of drug use, depression and inner pain to write a memoir as powerful as she did. In fact, she seems to have turned out just great. She benefited from summers-long stints at her grandparents on her mother's side's house in Illinois, which provided her with a more conventional worldview to balance out her otherwise very unconventional youth. She was placed into a first-rate private French school, one that is still there now. Finally, Alysia Abbott had her father, who – cliché as it may be for me to write – helped shape her into the person and the writer that she is today. Her book ends with Steve Abbott's inevitable and exceptionally sad death, though she does not milk it any more than is necessary to cleanly wrap up this coda in her tale, and ends the book with a short epilogue that ties the story into an elegy for the many, many men that were dying in horrible ways across San Francisco in the 80s and 90s - when many of us were looking the other way. It's a powerful piece of writing, and a terrific memoir that succeeds on just about every level.

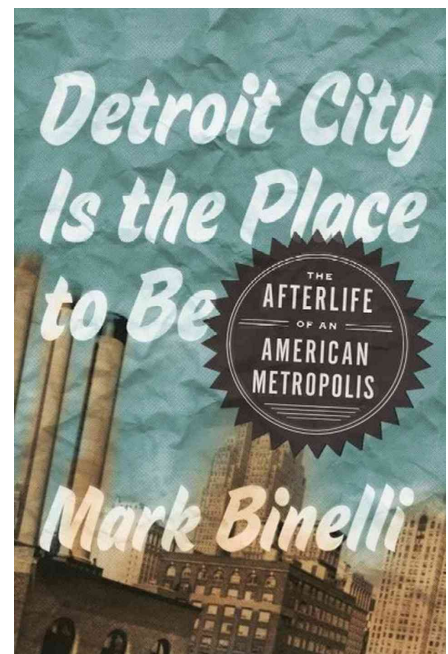
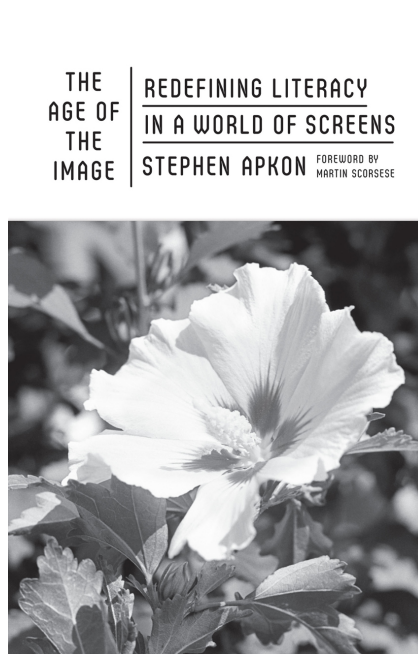
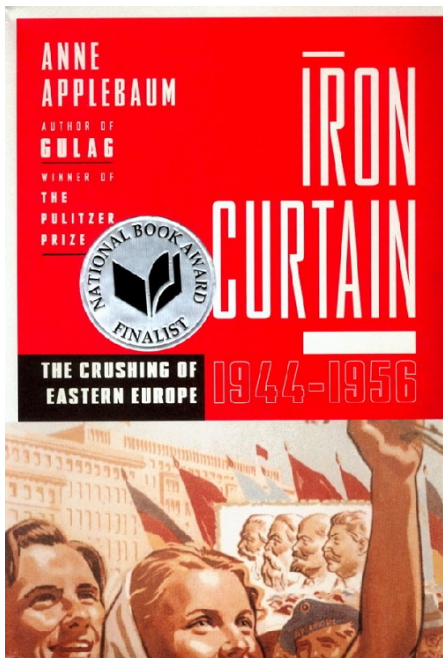
KARREN ABLAZE: "The City Is Ablaze! The Story of a Post-Punk Popzine, 1984-1994"

The fact that you're holding an actual ink-on-paper copy of *Dynamite Hemorrhage* in your hands right now should provide ample evidence that print fanzines never really lost their role as vital & indispensable secret decoder rings for true believers. Anyone who has ever felt a bond with someone who they've never met based solely on their written evangelicism of obscure bands that seemingly no one else knows or cares about (which

I'm assuming is essentially anyone currently reading this zine) should have those feelings rekindled by *The City Is Ablaze!*, a collection of material that originally appeared in Karren Ablaze's late '80s/early '90s underground music fanzine based in the UK. Even though I had never read an issue of *Ablaze!* (or even heard of the zine, to be honest) before getting my hands on this hefty anthology, it still felt so familiar to me as someone who spent the better part of the mid-'90s sitting in front of a tape deck in my suburban Houston bedroom, recording hours upon hours of programs from the local college radio station on stacks of blank cassettes while scribbling out the playlists in spiral notebooks whenever the DJs felt like back-announcing. In fact, Karren introduces the excerpts from her first zine (from 1987) with a similar story of hiding away in her garage as a teenager & seeking refuge from mainstream '80s popular culture through her radio, where she found solidarity in John Peel & pirate radio stations, which in turn led to impassioned letters written to independent record labels, fanzine authors & late-night DJs who shared her own obsessions.

The list of bands who were the object of Karren's affection in the pages of *Ablaze!* follows a parallel path (only about a decade apart) to my own evolution of a hopeless underground fanatic. There's the stars of my secret teenage archive of tapes & notebooks (Dinosaur Jr., the Pixies, Sonic Youth, Shudder to Think, Nation of Ulysses), the bands that mostly eluded me until I was making my own clumsy transitions between records on a college radio stations (DUSTdevils, the Pastels, Huggy Bear, Dog Faced Hermans, Pale Saints) & the soon-to-be ubiquitous bands of '90s mainstream alternative rock radio who served as the gateway drugs for my whole journey (Nirvana, Hole). There's even a letter from Morrissey reproduced from the pages of *The Value of Defiance* (the one-off zine Karren wrote shortly before launching *Ablaze!*), in which he informs her that "I do not want an interview with your fanzine because you obviously don't seriously care about me or the Smiths", which is pretty much the most ringing endorsement she could have gotten to completely snare me into the world of *Ablaze!*

The material reproduced from her earliest zine reflects the enthusiasm & naivety of a teenager diving headfirst into actively participating in DIY culture via awkward writing crudely cobbled together by nothing more than a typewriter, some scissors & a gluestick, but with each subsequent issue, her words are more confident, the interview questions are more intriguing & the scope of the zine expands from being focused around her backyard in Manchester to seemingly every corner of the world where weirdos & noiseniks dwell. Soon, there's full-color glossy covers, print runs that spike to 5,000 copies & bonus flexi disc singles with the likes of Pavement & the Wedding Present, all presented with an increasingly outspoken feminist consciousness coinciding with the rise of riot grrrl in the UK. *Ablaze!* weathered that transition from scrappy high school fanzine in the '80s to high-profile, influential touchstone of alternative music culture in the '90s without losing its irreverent sense of humor - Karren's witty, smart-ass introductions, context & commentary that Karren includes before the selections reprinted from each issue are absolutely priceless, although the reviews & interviews lifted directly from the zines are equally packed with hilarious one-liners. On attending one of the final Big Black shows in 1987: "All I saw were the hard, unyielding backs of many men, with a noise like a car crash coming from behind them". On speaking to Henry Rollins:



"Violent egomaniac, bragging about the weights he can lift & the teeth he knocked out". On being offered the opportunity to include a single with the zine that would have certainly been a publicity boost: "We'd rather eat out of dustbins for the rest of our lives than put out a Chapterhouse flexi". The complete *Ablaze!* poll results of "the stupidest things y'could do": "1. Fall in love, 2. Like the Stone Roses". Her interviews with some of the biggest figures in the Thatcher/Reagan-era underground scene often read more like conversations between goofball friends than stuffy music journalism, whether she's asking Mike Watt about his secret desire to collaborate with Madonna, or getting Kim Deal to gush enthusiastically about watching vampire bats drink blood at the Cincinnati zoo.

All of this doesn't accurately do justice to *The City Is Ablaze!* - this thing is literally jam-packed with feverish praise & withering criticism hiding in every nook & cranny. Just like the old copies of *the Big Takeover* & *Puncture* that I bought fifteen years ago & still flip through to this day (to the point of their covers barely hanging on to their staples), I think I'm going to just keep finding more & more music to be discovered in these pages each time I pick up the book & dig into it - you can't quite get that same feeling from a blog. Maybe there will be a *Dynamite Hemorrhage* print anthology someday, but in the meantime, this one should keep you busy. — **Erika Elizabeth**

JODI ANGEL – "You Only Get Letters From Jail"

A phenomenal collection of disturbing short stories, each written from the first-person perspective of a different confused, drifting and often unusually perceptive late-teenage boy. Jodi Angel's second collection of stories will, in fact, be recognizable to any of you who were yourselves once 16-19 year-old boys. It's all the more remarkable considering the gender of the author, who grew up in a family of girls, and her unwavering ability to get at the intersection of fear, bravado and shame that lays in the pituitary glands and developing brains of boys at a certain age.

The stories all take place in the parts of California that no one talks about – the outer reaches of the desert, the Central Valley

and the quasi-rural towns of the far North. Here, for a late-teenage boy, cars are one of the only acceptable forms of social currency, and each story has a lot of talk about 354 dual-cam engines with four on the floor *whatsis* that I couldn't even pretend to understand. The adults in these stories are almost universally disappointing; most are lost in alcohol, in Jesus, in grief or in loneliness. Kids mostly sneak around behind their parents' backs to drink beer, harass girls or go on missions to find anything to relieve the tedium of their surroundings. I love that the book moves well beyond cliché, however, and focuses more on the inner monologues of each storyteller than it does his bleak surroundings. It makes the thoughts and feelings of these boys so evocative of confused feelings I myself once had in my own suburban middle class comfort, in a very different part of California.

Boys in these tales will find a dead girl in a creek and not tell anyone about it; choose to willfully ignore the boasts of near-psychopathic men who tell see-through lies about disappeared girls; conflate a recently-viewed horror-porn film with an emergency C-section about to be performed on a freshly-hit deer on the side of the road; and pay penance for running over a cat by having to drink beer with an extremely lonely widow instead of mowing her lawn. It's excellent across the board, and I hope Angel takes home some hardware over the next few months as recognition for this outstanding collection.

STEPHEN APKON – "The Age of The Image – Redefining Literacy in a World of Screens"

2013 seemed to have been the year of excessive hand-wringing about our digital-dominated present. I've indulged in some of it myself. When we're not bemoaning the deaths or slow death pangs of totemic rituals like record store shopping; bookstore browsing; long, contemplative reading; and analog-based cinema, we're fretting that our children are organically moving away from the necessary sorts of book-learning that helped make each of us whom we are today (for better or for worse, right?) - and that we've created a short-attention-span generation that is already rewiring itself into a cohort that's, well, *dumber* than previous generations. It may all be very much

true. I certainly have my worries. Stephen Apkon turns the nervous blabbering into something quite a bit more realistic and hopeful for today's digital denizens; his book title, "**The Age of the Image: Redefining Literacy in a World of Screens**" truly says it all.

Apkon helped to found the Jacob Burns Film Center in New York City, and teaches both aspiring filmmakers and collaborates with students of the visual form there. He's strongly invested in evolving our understanding of the cultural world in which we find ourselves, and he's an excellent writer and transmitter of both fact and opinion. The first half of his book is exactly what I'd hoped it will be: succor for a nervous digital-age dad that the move toward *visual* literacy, as opposed to written-word literacy, isn't such a bad thing after all. Apkon confirms and relays much of the recent scientific literature that our brains are wired to accept, understand and retain visual imagery much better than we do the written word. Words on paper, unlike things we can see with our own eyes, either on the Serengeti plain or on YouTube, are a fully human construct. We forced this method of learning and understanding upon ourselves several centuries ago, and yes, it has served us well. Now technology has reached the stage - and the affordability - that we can tell our stories in a manner even *more* conducive to actual retention and understanding, something that our brains understand, retain and appreciate even more.

As a lover of great film who can *easily* be brought to tears through a fantastic image or film sequence - I'm thinking right now about the first zoom directly into Liv Ullmann's face when Erland Josephson tells her he wants a divorce in Ingmar Bergman's "Scenes From A Marriage", which made me pause the VHS tape and catch my breath and dab my eyes when I first saw it fifteen years ago - I'm fully bought in to how powerful and incisive the visual image can be in the hands of a great director. Like Apkon, I'm in no hurry to see book-learning die, either. His premise that we all need to understand and appreciate the conventions of visual imagery - how they're made, how they can be manipulated for good and for ill, and what tools are available for each of us to engage in making them - is spot-on, and I'd like to see his manifesto help to prod the educational establishments in each of our respective countries into a modest curriculum shift. I'm sold.

The book took a wicked left turn about two-thirds of the way in that I wasn't expecting at all. Apkon goes full-on professor all of a sudden, and extends his thesis into *practical* instruction on how to make a film (even if that film is only a 2-minute smartphone video). What is a producer? How do you set up your lighting? What apertures should you consider? That's where I stepped off the book for a chapter or two, in order to rejoin later for the concluding chapters. Perhaps it's because I'm a know-it-all fortysomething who doesn't need nor want to learn how to make a film. Perhaps I'm good enough already at understanding what goes into image-making, even if I don't do it myself. Or maybe I was just looking for a sociological and cultural overview of the state of visual learning and visual technology, and how it compares to our traditional way of understanding literacy, and wasn't looking for a hands-on practicum.

Regardless, I got what I wanted out of this book, and I found it be a very good thought-provoker. Others might approach the

book from different angles, and that's good - he's certainly got a couple of different angles from which to approach it.



STEPHEN APKON photo by Lynda Shenkman Curtis

ANNE APPELBAUM - "Iron Curtain – The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956"

If one were to opine, say, that Communism was one of the "worst ideas of all time", I'd have a hard time countering that statement with a well-formed and persuasive argument to what is nearly a truism at this point. If one were to hone that opinion a bit and say that "*Soviet-style Communism*", the kind exported to Eastern Europe after World War II, was one of the, if not *the* worst idea of all time, I'd probably stand up and cheer. Communism's preposterous, dangerous, utopian fantasies on the nature of man, as well as how these command-and-control totalitarian ideas actually played out, were responsible for untold death, misery and suffering in the 20th century, on a global scale that dwarfs even the Nazis' atrocities. It's an irony of history to look back and realize that it was Hitler's stupidity and European domination fantasies that paved the way for the Soviet Union's decades-long crushing of those same countries. One or the other was probably bound to control Eastern Europe in the 1940s, and Jewish residents notwithstanding, it's hard to say under whose boot life would have been worse.

Anne Applebaum is a Sovietologist and writer of the highest order. Her massive book "**Gulag: A History**" is the definitive study of the Soviet gulag prison system, though I'll admit its breadth and massiveness is what's kept me from actually reading it (so far). For those weirdos among us who delight in

histories of postwar realignments, retributions and the birth of the Cold War, the arrival of her **"Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956"** late in 2012 was a cause for celebration. I made a decision to dig deep within myself and get through this large tome, and thanks to Audible.com and my long daily commute, I did so. It was a pleasure to "read" it, and it certainly stiffened my spine with regard to my distaste for Communism and for much of the sordid, depressing 20th century.

Applebaum is an excellent relayer of history, and she uses both primary and secondary source material to advance many personal stories of life under Soviet rule in the countries of Poland, Hungary and East Germany during the 11 years following World War II. She chooses those years because 1956, where the book ends, is the year that is popularly recognized as the first true, crushed anti-Soviet rebellion (in Hungary, and to a lesser extent in Poland). She chooses those 3 countries because, well, there were far better and more cohesive-to-a-theme stories there, than if she'd chosen, say, Yugoslavia (in which Tito carved out a repressive and murderous yet anti-Stalin path) or Albania (now where is that again?). Her style is deft, light and non-ponderous, and she does a great job weaving straight history and intense personal stories into several big chapter-long "subjects".

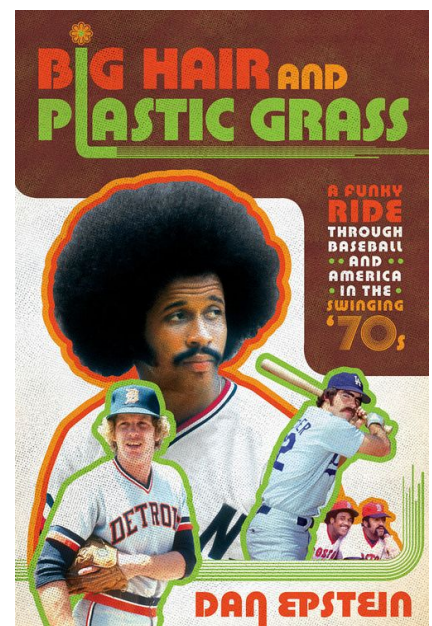
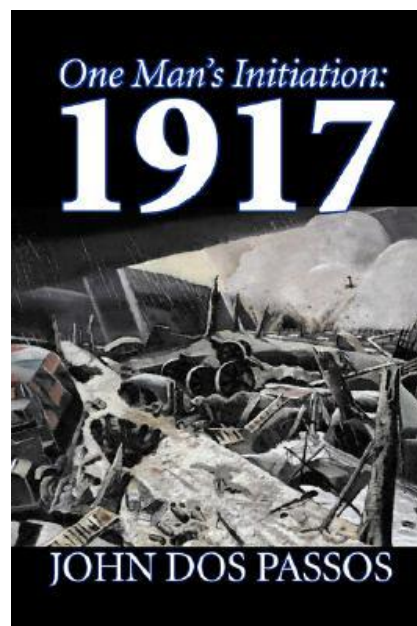
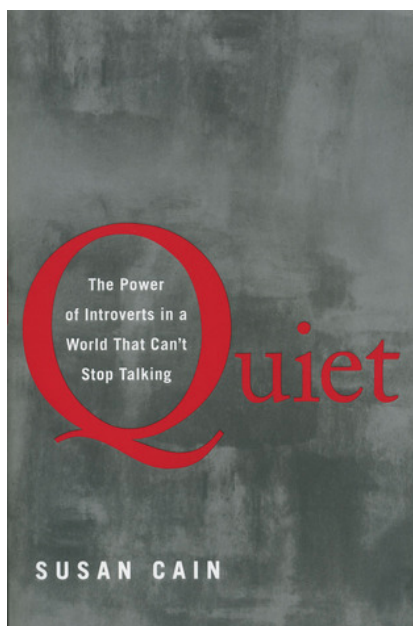
These subjects, all facets of the Soviets' command-and-control crushing of all spheres of Eastern European civil and economic life, are explained in illuminating but rarely boring detail in each chapter. Examples include "Youth" - how the Soviets co-opted or banned existing youth organizations, like scouts, as part of their paranoid desire to eliminate all traces of activity outside of those that glorified Stalin and the goals of Communism. Another chapter is on the ludicrous show trials, with their forced public confessions; another on entertainment (the Soviets actually cracked down mightily on Polish hepcats who danced to American jazz); another on heinous economic blundering via collectivization schemes, and so on.

What's clear is that in the post-WWII chaos, the only thing that was certain is that the Red Army was in these countries, and

that they were putatively in charge. How things were actually going to play out was not exactly known, but the *Soviets* knew. They started a campaign of looting, plundering and then mass arrests that established both their domination and their ruthlessness, all the while lying to the Americans and British about the free societies they would be overseeing. Elections *were* in fact held in these countries, and for the first few postwar years, they were somewhat free. Yet they didn't quite go the way Mother Russia wanted them to – too many social democrats or "light" Communists, not enough "Little Stalins" to kowtow to Stalin – and they were essentially vetoed in time, via arrests, terror and wholesale changes in election laws until the right people were in charge.

This ugly period was followed by a worse one, "high Stalinism", the years in which Eastern European countries suffered a complete dismantling of their former selves. Lasting until Stalin's death in 1953 and Krushchev's "secret speech" that followed, it is the societal vision that provided the fodder for George Orwell's 1949 classic **"1984"**. One thing Applebaum illuminates extremely well in this book is the importance of civil society – voluntary organizations, entertainment, charities, sporting clubs – that lie beyond state control. The Soviet Union absolutely destroyed and outlawed every facet of it in Poland, Hungary and Eastern Germany, and made daily life for individuals a life in which everything outside of the immediate family unit was 100% defined by the state: where you worked, how you worked, where and how you were schooled, what you did with your leisure time, and so on.

Due to excessive paranoia, the chance of being arrested and thrown into the Gulag, or even executed for crimes real or imagined, was very high – perhaps even if it was a distant family member whose acts brought suspicion upon you. Woe betide you further if you were Jewish in the era during and after high Stalinism; societies that were already anti-Semitic toward the few Jews not murdered during the previous decades were goaded into more vile acts of Jew-hate by their puppetmasters in Moscow, and by the leaders in their own countries doing their bidding. As we know, even after this era, the Soviet-led tyranny of these countries continued for nearly four more grim decades.



The opening of the state archives after 1989 was certainly a great gift to history, and to this book.

If you ask me whether Applebaum has any real nuance toward her subject – meaning, does she provide a "counter-argument" to the Soviet Union's stupidity and hideousness – I'd say no, she definitely does not. Neither do I, as it happens, nor should we. American and British paranoia during the Cold War was based upon fact and reality, if played out a bit strangely and in "un-American" ways at times. Marxist ideology had within it that the great revolutions were at hand and were soon to play out in country after country. Stalin did all he could, through terror and intimidation, to bend history to fit the established Marxist narrative. It's a sad epoch that many of us alive actually lived through, though thankfully in my case in the freedoms of the West, and in the final two decades of Eastern Europe's subjugation.

This book is an essential overview of just *how good* people like me and my parents had it, living on the soil that we did *when* we did, without even talking about the United States nor about the west at all. It also underscores how different life might have been for people like my Jewish wife, or my friends or Polish or German descent, had their parents and their parents' parents not emigrated out of Eastern Europe in the years before World War II, and had they even made it into the late 40s and early 50s after years of slaughter and killing. It's abundantly clear that this was truly a rotten time and place to have been alive, and that we ignore how it all played out to our own ignorance and peril.

MARK BINELLI - "Detroit City is the Place to Be"

The city of Detroit is pretty *meta* right now. Merely talking about Detroit and its unprecedented decline is old hat. We've all seen the ruin porn, breathlessly emailed across the internet and splashed across design and news sites to generate clicks and ad sales. We're now into the phase where we dissect *why* we're all so fascinated with Detroit, and mock those who spend an inordinate amount of time gaining *schadenfreude* or perverse thrills from watching a city that has hopelessly, helplessly imploded. Former resident Mark Binelli decided to write an entire book about it – a journalistic tendency so many others have of late have shared, either making documentaries or writing their own books about the city. As one of those people sitting on the other side of the internet with his hand on the mouse, clicking on picture after picture of destroyed train station and trashed high school and weed-choked house, I figured I probably needed to get his take on the matter, so I bought his book.

"Detroit City Is The Place To Be" is a newish (mid-2012) book that was at the time pretty up to date on Detroit's situation – its decline into near-state receivership, the supposed rebirth of the auto industry, the "let Detroit return to the land" plan by Mayor Dave Bing; and most interestingly, the rebranding of Detroit as a hip, cheap, art-friendly place for slow foodies, sculptors, musicians and other underground types. The book sets up tension between the viewpoint that Detroit is a total goner and the more optimistic view that the seeds of its rebirth are being planted. Along the way, Binelli takes chapters-long detours into topics like the city's obscenely high crime rate; its gun culture; its ruins; its car industry's sordid history; the popularized techno and arts scenes and the many Europeans who still make pilgrimages to the city to find them, and much more. Every

chapter evinces the tension and the debate he's set up in a very entertaining and story-laden manner: Dead, or Being Reborn?

It's probably important to note that Binelli is what my conservative father might call a "pinko". That is, his hard-left politics get a little too much in the way of telling a factual and well-rounded story. Seems that every time he's about to unload his journalistic guns on incompetent and ridiculous political boobs like former Detroit mayors Kwame Kilpatrick and Coleman Young, he instead finds a way to extract some silver lining that exonerates them nearly in full, based on their swagger or their mouthiness or some other ludicrous characteristic, and blames Reagan or Wall Street or yuppies instead. So when you're reading Binelli, just know that in his world, the unions and their leadership are mostly blameless for Detroit's predicament, and the mayors were primarily victims of the white establishment, who didn't want them to succeed and therefore brought about their downfall for racist or *subconsciously* racist reasons. When he got into this mode, that's when I went into book-skimming mode, waiting for Binelli to start telling good stories again – which he thankfully does more often than not.

All Binelli needs to do is record the things that people he meets in Detroit say, or quote some outlandish things that politicians of the present and past have said, and the book is nearly a laff-a-minute. He's a good writer and storyteller, and he brings the right perspective to his former hometown. He's saddened, chagrined, and a little angry about what's happened to the city (which was in sorry decline during his 1980s boyhood and is far worse now), and he's a very good historian of the sordid and the seedy when he's not on his high leftist horse. He speaks truth to power, as long as the power aren't the ones pretending to be shilling for the working man and the downtrodden. Binelli makes it abundantly clear that even though the media are hyping these white back-to-the-land urban farming types, with their artisanal coffee collectives and outdoor art exhibits, Detroit is a *black* city through and through, and what's getting media attention is about 5% of what's really going on in Detroit.

Detroit doesn't really have an African-American middle/upper class the way Atlanta does; they all moved away. It's a poor city, with very little tax base, no infrastructure, awful weather, and a singular industry propped up by the beneficence of government and American taxpayers that makes cars that no one really wants (or when they do, it's gas-guzzling enormo-trucks). Whole sections of the city lack public services and are being reclaimed by nature – even while people continue to live there, for lack of money or the will to leave. That Binelli strikes a hopeful note in the conclusion, however, is not altogether disingenuous. He makes a strong effort at documenting how, when you've hit bottom, everything is "up", and he convincingly outlines a future for Detroit. It may not look anything like the past – nor like the green paradise that some people might wish upon it – but a future nonetheless. I'm buying it. I just might not be around to see it when it arrives in 50-100 years.

SUSAN CAIN - "Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking"

I went through a pretty lengthy period of my life *certain* that I was an extrovert; I mean, I had been a fast-talking college radio DJ; I "sang" in a couple of punk rock bands; I'd been an elementary school "class clown" who'd willingly stay after school for the

pleasure of making my peers laugh; I'd had many friends over my teens and twenties with whom I liked to "party"; and my career has been split up into parts as a customer service rep, in which I gabbed with people on the phone all day (and liked it), and a marketing dude, in which I've needed to be gregarious and outgoing and even a public speaker from time to time. So why did I keep scoring as an "introvert" on all those psychological tests the companies I worked for would throw at us as a means of understanding ourselves and our co-workers? And why did I find it so refreshing and necessary to be *alone* so often, up to and including going to films, rock shows and readings deliberately by myself? Why were my main hobbies all focused around solitary writing, reading or listening, and why did I actually physically recoil from airplane small talk, and from entering parties in which I didn't know anyone? Why did I even sometimes drive several miles to a party, and then leave before I entered; or pull a disappearing act when things got uncomfortable, and walk out without saying a thing to anyone? And why was (is) the idea of being a cross-country truck driver later in life, after I've made all my millions, so incredibly appealing? Because I'm a goddamn introvert, that's why.

The "extrovert ideal" is a big one in Western culture. We're subliminally and explicitly encouraged to be "open", to generate charisma, to exude confidence and to never admit to "loner" tendencies, or god forbid, shyness. Susan Cain's excellent bestseller takes on, and then dismantles, this mythos very effectively. You see, it turns out about a third to one half of us are introverts. Sure, we might have elements of our personalities that fall more on the extroversion scale than otherwise, and a lot of us - myself included - are not too bad at faking it. Yet I know who I am at the end of the day. I'm not shy, I'm not anti-social, and I'm not even "all up in my head" most of the time - but there's no question that without plentiful alone time and a retreat from noise and the social world, I will get extremely aggravated. Given a choice of doing something alone and doing it with people I don't know very well, I'll *always* very happily do it alone. Unless I'm with my family or close friends, I'd usually rather do my own thing. Always have, always will, I'm pretty certain. And I do in fact like and enjoy other people's company, and I hold no hostile positions *vis-a-vis* other people I don't know.

Cain makes it clear that not only are there a ton of us like this out there, we express our introversion in different ways, and that we use numerous coping/covering mechanisms to get by in a society that explicitly values extroversion. For instance, I *made* myself learn how to speak in public, once a boss asked me to cover some trade show event for him. I'm not kidding when I tell you that the "fight-or-flight" trigger was so incredibly high that day, that five minutes before I was due on stage at a conference in San Jose, I very nearly walked out of the building and into my car. Yet, while I wouldn't say I "killed" on stage that day, I actually did all right, and have done as well most of the other times I've been up at a podium in front of an unknown crowd. I even kinda like it now, despite huge bouts of nerves and sweaty, low-level terror in the hours beforehand.

"**Quiet**" covers introversion not in a manner that marks it as superior to extroversion, but as a different and very key innate personality trait that should be valued and rewarded for its own merits. Turns out that thoughtful contemplation, deep thinking, modesty, deference and quiet competence has been

responsible for some of the greatest art, thought, writing, ideas, inventions and even CEO-level leadership the world has ever known. Where you fall on the spectrum of introversion/extroversion has a ton to do with your DNA, no question about it - but the science is not conclusive about how much is nature and how much comes from nurture (i.e. your parenting and your early life). It appears that a parent can have a great deal to do with how well or poorly you approach any early shyness or withdrawn tendencies, and whether it becomes a pathology or a celebrated part of who you are as you get older.

Cain looks at introversion from several angles in each successive chapter. There were two that really hit home for me, once her descriptions of my own personal behavior and makeup became so indisputable and spot-on that I have begun to proudly wear my introversion as a badge of friggin' honor. First, Cain talked about the modern workplace. It has become very fashionable for well-meaning executives to pontificate about "the open office", in which cubicle walls are taken down and tables are instead arranged so that groups can sit together and "collaborate". The theory goes that if we remove barriers that keep us from communicating, we'll communicate more, and therefore be more productive and collaborative and, that's right, happier. No more soulless retreats into your own space. Now we all get to hang out together, all day, sometimes 10-11 hours a day! We're gonna be *soooo* productive!

Of course, it doesn't work. Sure, the science and studies that Cain quotes doesn't totally debunk the idea that for *some* people, and *some* groups, more communication in the open is better than having to get up and walk to someone else's cube or office. Yet the distractions, the noise, the loss of privacy and so on are *devastating* for the productivity of many, introverts in particular. They/we have a much more difficult time processing multiple different-volume conversations, other people's music and our own work at the same time. Me, I can't even listen to music while I work or write, not even classical, jazz or dub. Computer programmers often choose their line of work so that they can code in peace; they often prematurely quit jobs in which they're forced to share their work with others in close quarters, and in which they're distracted by people talking in and around them. I have worked in this sort of office before, and I can tell you that I mostly loathe it, and others with whom I work that are most similar to me in temperament do as well. There's a reason why self-purchased noise-cancelling headphones were *de rigeur* and extremely popular at the most recent office I've worked in that had an open floor plan.

My other favorite chapter of Cain's book concerns Asian-Americans, and the question of whether introversion/extroversion is cultural. I think you know where I'm going with this. It absolutely is. She interviews multiple extremely successful Asian students in the heavily Asian enclave of Cupertino, CA, and what it's like for them to leave their 75% Asian high school, in which study and listening and deferred social gratification are paramount, and arrive at places like Harvard or UMass or Stanford, where class participation, group work and social bonding are highly rewarded. It's eye-opening stuff. The way that cultures developed in the West and East, and the way those cultures and norms are perpetuated to this day, is interesting in any case; to hear them explained along such a defining personality trait as introversion or extroversion is illuminating.

For those of us that are parents, there's a good chapter near the end about raising introverted children. In my own case, I'm raising a kid that needs to occasionally be talked down from the ledge of extreme *extroversion*, so this chapter didn't help me except as a way to empathize with some of his friends and friends' parents who are working to encourage their children to be who they are, while carefully drawing them out of their proverbial shells.

The lessons of the book, which I encourage you read if you're at all interested in something that's quite a bit deeper than pop psychology but not as intense as a doctoral seminar, are clear to me. To thine own self be true, number one. Regardless of the prevailing cultural norm, you are who you are (at this point in your life), and faking it for someone else's benefit can be much more painful and psychologically soul-rendering for you than it is beneficial to you in the long run. That said, lesson #2 is that we introverts all have various adaptations we can and should try on for size that will make our lives easier. Simply retreating in all cases is not an option, nor is it a desirable one for anybody. Funny enough, Cain calls out the internet as a place where so many of us have found a "voice", trite as it sounds, that happens to be an alternative to the social sphere of face-to-face communication. That's not *always* for the good, of course, but it allows many creative and interesting people to amplify their personas in ways that bring their true characters and ideas to life, in ways that would otherwise be hidden to the world. And if you're scoring as an "I" on those Myers-Briggs exams, don't worry about it. So did Bill Gates, George Orwell, Charles Darwin, Dr. Seuss, Audrey Hepburn, Albert Einstein, Meryl Streep, Steve Wozniak and David Letterman. They did OK.

JOHN DOS PASSOS – “One Man’s Initiation”

My first, uh, initiation to Dos Passos is this 1920 novella, his first book concerning a young American man's entrée into World War I. Knowing that Dos Passos himself saw some action in The Great War, it stands to reason that much of this is drawn from the firsthand. His title character is Martin Howe, a young man who leaves the USA on a steamer for France with other scared conscripts and aggro soldiers, full of wonder and chagrin about what's he's about to experience. Howe concludes his stay overseas as a full-stop socialist, bemused and upset by the “lies” and betrayals on all sides, and full of undying love for the quote-unquote brotherhood of man. It may be a little too “of its time” as a socialist siren call; and as I understand it, even Dos Passos later worked tirelessly for Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon before he shuffled off our mortal coil. Utopian dreams have a way of dying rather hard, don't they?

There is one particularly wonderful and moving chapter in the book that takes place in Paris while Martin and his southern buddy Tom Randolph are on leave. They get into it with some prostitutes, have wonderfully lavish white-tablecloth meals, befriend a sad English drunk, and essentially find their humanity and even some measure of dignity in an all-too-short break from slaughter and pointlessness. The book repeatedly allows the men doing the fighting to brand themselves as “slaves” and “dupes”. There's a good soliloquy toward the end about the United States once having being a special refuge for immigrants from Europe's wars, but no longer, as America, by involving itself in this most destructive of European wars, has become just as morally rotten as the feuding states of Europe.

Tom and Martin and their new Allied pals bullshit around the campfire about anarchy, the nature of peace, the working masses and other sundry intellectual topics that may or may not have been actually discussed in real life by the grunts on the ground.

That gets to one small problem I had with “One Man's Initiation” – its believability. Dos Passos' magnificent way with words is both a blessing and curse, because some of the things that come out of the mouths of these war-fightin' babes in arms are more than a little florid and overboard. *The sky, the sun, the grass, the quality of the light* – nothing is too mundane to describe at PhD-level intellectual detail for these battle-weary gentlemen. Yes, it becomes obvious in no time at all that Mr. Dos Passos is/was no fan of the war, and that's surely fine – it certainly does seem to have been rather pointless, to say the least. I'd like to go a little deeper into his catalog and see what he did after this one, as my interest was sufficiently piqued by this somewhat flawed first leap into writing.

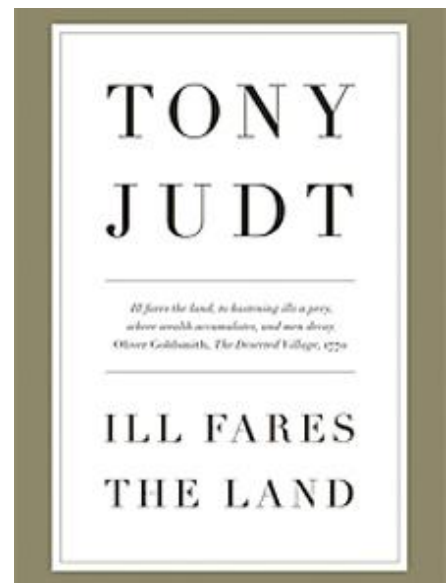
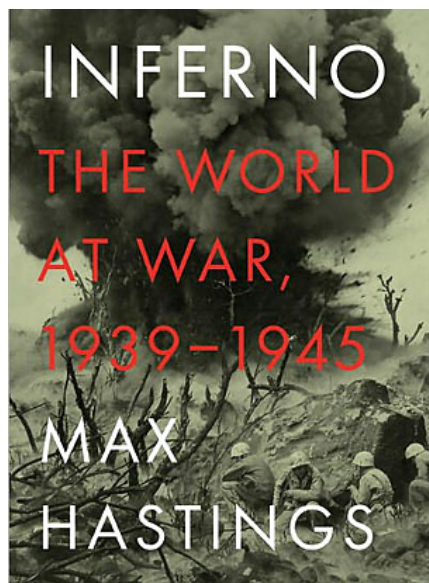
DAN EPSTEIN – “Big Hair and Plastic Grass: A Funky Ride Through Baseball and America in the Swinging '70s”

Before I prostrated myself unreservedly and wholeheartedly unto music, record collecting and radio, I was a Grade-A baseball nerd: card collecting, obsessive statistical memorization and unrelenting support for my awful San Francisco Giants teams of the late 70s. It was more than just the Giants, though; I threw myself into all things Major League Baseball at the age of 9 and onward, and went to my first game in '76 (August 8th, 1976 – doubleheader against the Reds, in fact; a Top 5 highlight of my life to that point). I followed the sport with the zeal of a child with limited entertainment options beyond books, LPs and outdoor play, and this fandom, seared and formed in the crucible of wacked-out 1970s baseball, continues only slightly diminished to this day.

Dan Epstein gets it. He, too, was a baseball obsessive, and his ability to take a highly ironic, pop-cultural look at how baseball transformed itself during the 70s is extremely entertaining, and one of the best “light” books I've read in a long while. I'd rate this even higher than “Loose Balls”, Terry Pluto's oral history of the American Basketball Association (ABA), which remains one of the great sports books of our time. Epstein went on to write liner notes for Rhino, Shout Factory and other archival record labels, and it's his ability to take a snarky but reverential view of the



DAN EPSTEIN



decade without being too cliché about the 70s' foibles that is so fetching. Either that, or my nostalgia just happened to be set into overdrive as he recounts things like "The Big Red Machine"; the brawling Oakland A's championship clubs of the mid-70s; the disastrous "Disco Demolition Night" of 1979 at Chicago's Cominsky Park; Billy Martin; wet t-shirt contests (*remember those? I actually went to one at a minor league game in 1979. I was 11.*), Mark "The Bird" Fidrych, Oscar Gamble's afro, and so on.

It's funny, Epstein even writes like he's trapped in a Sporting News game recap from 1978, conjuring up long-dead terms that I remember well like "round-tripper", "three-bagger". "fireman" and "ribbies". Early on he professes a respect for modern Sabermetrics, but says he won't employ them in his book, and just like the sportswriters of the day, the only key stats he deigns to mention when describing a batter are (Avg., HR, RBI) and (W-L, ERA, strikeouts) for a pitcher. One forgets in the age of 5-man rotations and pitch counts just how hard some of these starting pitchers worked; Wilbur Wood of the Chicago White Sox had a record one year of 24-20, and guys like Phil Niekro would routinely pitch 300+ innings every year. Then there's just the immense nostalgia that comes from having players like Dave Kingman and Bake McBride jar your memory back to life. Epstein takes a methodical look at every year of the decade, each of which merits its own chapter, yet unfortunately can only skim the surface on some of these iconic players.

The decade gave the sport some of its best and worst attributes: free agency; monstrous 60,000-seat stadiums; the designated hitter; George Steinbrenner; the "save"; beanballs; outspoken and unkempt, hirsute players; baseball in Canada and more. Epstein covers it all in tones both humorous and magisterial, and if you want an eminently readable book on the sport and the decade, this here's your tome.

MAX HASTINGS - "Inferno – The World at War, 1939-1945"
After several decades of laser-focused readings and documentary viewings of *aspects* of World War II, I found myself confronted with some chronological and contextual challenges. Namely, when did x happen in relation to y, and how was it perceived in the contexts in the times, versus by historians in the 21st century? A representative example might

be the role of Finland in World War II. Maps of the Nazi allies always show Finland as axis country - why? Were the Finns anti-semites and big fans of Hitler? (No - they hated the Soviet Union with a passion for a repelled late 30s invasion of their country). Another example: "The Battle of Britain" is rightly hailed as a huge milestone in defending the English people against Hitler - but when did it happen again? Before or after Hitler started bombing London in the "blitz"? (Before the blitz, and England's success in the air over the English channel helped steel that country for both the blitz and the perils of the larger war - changing history as we know it for the better as a result).

Being marginally familiar with the work of historian Max Hastings, I'd vowed to read one of his books one of these days - I always tell myself when I retire, I'll read *all of the books*, the ones by Hastings and everyone else - and then his single-volume World War II history "**Inferno**" arrived in late 2011. (It's called "All Hell Lets Loose" in other parts of the world). I figured it was just the ticket to help me get a stronger grounding with the war - and if it was well-written and a compelling read, all the better. It was, without a doubt, all those things - and one of the strongest works of history I've ever read. It would be hard for me to recommend it any higher to both WWII buffs and novices alike. Like Tony Judt's "Postwar", which for obvious reasons picks up right where this one leaves off, it's a dense but amazingly approachable work of history, and I was quite honestly bummed out when I was done with it.

Hastings tackles WWII with a number of biases that I'd hesitate to call biases - they're more "historian's prerogative". One prerogative is that a work of history like this one is more illuminated by real-time personal stories and narratives - *here's what a besieged Leningrad girl wrote in her diary in 1942* - than it is by the historian's retroactive judgment on events. I happen to agree with this line of writing, as did Judt, and it really helps place many WWII actions and reactions in the context of the times. Examples include the US decision to drop nuclear weapons on Japan in 1945 and massive bombing of German cities such as Dresden and Hamburg by US and UK planes. It's not like Hastings doesn't use historical revisions and the unsealing of evidence over the years to his advantage and only relies on eyewitness, real-time judgment to tell stories; he

supports the Japan decision and reviles the Germany bombings, for instance. Yet he's a master at threading chronological names-and-places history with recollections of people on the ground to then tell deeper stories, and while he may have his view on what was necessary and just, and what was simply cruel and barbaric, he presents history in such a way that gives all sides a voice - and that includes the non-Nazi Germans and the Soviet citizenry who were tormented by Stalin and Hitler and then Stalin again.

Another prerogative of Hastings' is just how poorly we in the west have interpreted the bigger picture of the war over the years, in our zeal to tell great stories of American and British valor. Hastings, along with many modern historians, knows that World War II was primarily the story of the Soviet Union vs. Germany, and that the true war was won & lost in the bloodlands between those countries. I'm sure younger people among you, accustomed to a more thorough telling of history in the 1990s to today, might see that as pretty obvious. I was schooled in the 1970s, only thirty years after the war's end, and I knew much about the US and England's battles and decisions, but didn't even hear the word Stalingrad nor about the destruction of the Baltics, nor the many enormous battles in what's now Belarus and the Ukraine. Hastings covers the entire breadth of the war, including huge parts on the Asia Pacific theater, but he's very clear about the scale and the strategic importance of the Eastern front in determining the sort of world we all live in today. If you're on the fence about it, read (or listen to) this book, and I assure you you won't be much longer.

Finally, it's the mark of a great writer and storyteller to be able to write a full single volume on a massive war and still haunt you viscerally with the sheer pain and horror suffered by so many. I had to stop on numerous occasions and contemplate the human stories of displacement; long marches to new lands; hideous and unimaginable starvation; the death of children; cannibalism; death camps and so on. Hastings, while capturing a litany of horrors along with his staid, chronological telling of the war, is careful to examine the human cost not just in lives, but in what the war did to human psyches: how it made otherwise good men barbaric killers, say, or how starvation drove Jewish prisoners or besieged Soviets to turn against one another. I know a lot of people say it and a lot of them say it often, but I can't believe this happened in the lifetimes of people still living. It seems like another world, another people, another age. Hastings reminds us time and again that this metaphorical "Inferno" exists not just in 1939-45, but in the hearts and minds of men both before and after that era as well.

JESSE JARNOW – “Big Day Coming: Yo La Tengo and the Rise of Indie Rock”

You know, I'm not exactly sure *why* I bought a book about Yo La Tengo. Outside of an early show of theirs that I caught around 1988 and quite enjoyed, I've mostly remained a very distant admirer of their doggedly true-to-selves musical personalities and their evolutionary nature over the decades, and have never been too invested in the band's music. I don't think I've even owned a record of theirs since “New Wave Hot Dogs”. I believe I brought this one to the cash register more for the semi-nostalgic identification I'd get from the “rise of indie rock” portion of the title, and because my brief in-store skim convinced me that the book was really about the forces that came together to propel independent, iconoclastic rock music from the margins to the accepted place it came to occupy in the 90s.



TONY JUDT

So while it *is* about that to a degree, Yo La Tengo's career and personalities are the delivery mechanism by which that history is delivered. It really is a book about them, and while I have nothing but respect for Ira Kaplan and Georgia Hubley (the band's leading lights), “Hammer of the Gods” this book is not. The financial struggles and inner workings of Homestead Records is about as salacious as the thing gets, and the inside-baseball approach to the 80s Hoboken scene and assorted other indie ephemera only gets the heart racing so much, you know what I mean? I took away a little bit more respect for the arc of Gerard Cosloy's music industry involvement over many years, having delicately midwived so many excellent records into existence since the 80s. With some historical hindsight now available to us, the tastemaking track record of his Homestead and Matador Records – both of whom employed Yo La Tengo for the bulk of their career – truly did have a decided impact on carving a swath of quality that actually reached the ears of multitudes beyond me and my cynical and snark-ridden know-it-all pals.

Outside of that and a few other sprinkled anecdotes, I'd tout this one for the fans, and the fans only.

TONY JUDT - “Ill Fares The Land”

I'll sheepishly admit that I came back and read this book by historian Tony Judt, after once rejecting it after reading its first ten pages a year or so ago. Why? Well, I've just become more and more open to the way he looked at the world. Maybe I'm becoming a big boy now. What at first read to me like a jeremiad against my general belief in free markets and creative destruction *is*, in fact, just that. It's *me* that's coming around to the fact that my political persuasion in 2014 is not really what it was in 2004 nor 1994.

For years I've proudly worn the “libertarian” lapel pin and flown the free minds/free markets flag in things I've written, in how I've voted and in my pontifications to anyone who might want to know what I think about things (not many, let me tell ya). This past year I decided to take the pin off. I'm no libertarian – or if I am, I'm a totally fraudulent one. I'm just a namby-pamby liberal at the end of the day – no different from you, probably. My last bastion of rebelliousness against gutless conformity has finally been broken.

I blame Tony Judt. Not entirely because of his final book, “Ill

Fares The Land", though the ideas within it, which he espoused frequently throughout his books "Postwar" and "Thinking The Twentieth Century" have been percolating in my conscience for some time. No, it's due to a dawning mistrust of many actors and authority figures who make up life as we know it these days. The government, "the state", had always been my biggest, and sometimes my only, bugaboo. Until and even after the 2008 recession I had almost undying faith in markets, but my rhetoric and past proclamations to the contrary, I can't say that that's completely true anyone. I've always believed myself to be a "social liberal" on most issues, and for the most part I believe in capitalism as the best system of economic and societal organization ever created. Yet Judt's arguments for a return to many aspects the "social democracies" of FDR-era New Deal America and the postwar governments of Europe sound better now to me than they ever have at any time in my life. I'm willing to consider that the safety net could, and probably *should*, be enlarged, and that this might in fact be a net positive for America and like-minded countries like the UK. I'm willing to consider that The State might actually be sometimes considered a guarantor and extendor of freedoms, rather than a suffocator of liberty.

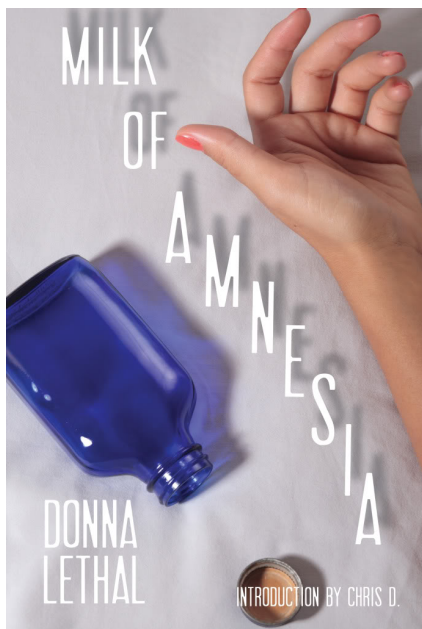
Essentially, Judt's book, which was dictated to his assistants as he was sadly dying of ALS several years ago, and then published in 2010, is a small distillation of a core theme in all of his writing: that Western society was at its best in the postwar era of 1945-1980, and saw unprecedented advances in opportunity, equality, rights and wealth during these years. Judt believes in no uncertain terms that Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan put the brakes on this, and pandered to humanity's more base instincts in the pursuit of profit for some at the expense of the many. This has led to an atomization of society and a painful inequality that we're still reeling under, in his telling, and a shredded safety net that leaves society's most vulnerable scared, sick and unable to advance in their own lifetimes. I'm not being unfair in stating his positions as being this starkly black and white, because that's exactly what they are. Pre-1980 = *good*; Post-1980 = *bad*.

There are many things I find preposterous and wrong in the way Judt writes about the post-social democracy years. This is a guy who is more reactionary than any 1980s conservative, except he's looking nostalgically backward at the State-managed utopias of the 50s and 60s, rather than at the "family morals" of that era. Judt overreaches greatly, and celebrates a made-up world in which we all had a unity of purpose and enjoyed being under the benevolent hand of the US or UK or Swedish government, up to and including a call for a return to a glorious pre-automobile era in which we all reveled in being crowded together on buses. Judt fails to recognize that capitalism, and how people define themselves vis-a-vis The State, are always evolving and changing, and that what worked in 1955 needs to also be informed by the knowledge of what worked in 1980, 1994 and in 2013 – and that knowledge includes *why* the people of England elected Thatcher three times and the people of the US elected Ronald Reagan twice (three times as well, if you count the first George Bush). We didn't just become stupefied and lame in 1980 – Judt's social democracies, as currently constituted, were choking under the economic dead weight of much of what they had wrought.

It's the sort of government-knows-best moralism that I can't stand. Judt also seems to forget that humanity is made up of widely varying levels of intelligence, and that, unfortunately, there really is and will always be a natural stratification of humanity along intelligence lines. That said – *moralism* is the main reason I recommend this book. Judt is at his best when he encourages readers to consider political views as having an intensely moral component. Not, "Will this proposed policy fit my political views?", but "Is this policy the right and moral thing to do for the most number of people?". Health care is a perfect example. The social democracies, with the exception of the US, enacted state-controlled policies of health care that certainly have their flaws, but that also ensure that health care is a "right" that is effectively free and inalienable, provided in exchange for consent to a higher rate of taxation. Was this the right thing to do? Talk to a Canadian, or a Brit, or a Swede. Ask them if they'd like to switch to the United States' model of health care. I've yet to find one that would.

There is a moral dimension in extolling the profit motive above all else, and I'm getting tired of defending the latter (to myself, especially). I'm a guy who went and got an MBA in the 1990s (instead of the poverty-assuring Masters in English Literature that I *really* wanted), and one that finds much to admire about American business. Even back then, though, I had my doubts about many aspects of modern capitalism as practiced. I think that the way public companies are run in the United States is a big problem (short-term profits and stock market gains driving short-term, profit-above-all-else behavior – which is not healthy for a company long-term, nor for the society it sits in). I'm fed up with the complicated ties between government and banks and Wall Street; for instance, I would greatly prefer a simple set of well-understood rules for, say, mortgages – like, "all borrowers need to put 20% down before they can buy a house" - and Fannie & Freddie and the complicated hedge schemes and derivatives can die out. I, like Judt, would like to see a safety net that successfully eliminates poverty, squalor and need in the richest country on earth. I even can see some sense in his arguments for publicly funded broadcasting, where I saw only stupidity before. His book, along with my observations of the world since 2008, has me adjusting my first principles a bit, and I think that's a good thing.

If anything, I'll work to incorporate a more moral dimension into how I think about spending, regulation and taxation issues. I was already a libertarian apostate on guns (I hate 'em) and on some criminal justice issues (I'm actually a bit of a right-wing nut when it comes to locking up violent criminals). I think the mark of a healthy society is one that looks at what's worked in the past, what's working now and what's broken, and continually readjusts to fit present realities. If that means that we address certain aspects of modern life with state-run solutions that private enterprise isn't effectively tackling, then so be it. (I also still very much believe in the opposite – like, say, the post office). I may not pine for a pure State-run social democracy a la Sweden in the 60s, but I'm willing to consider that there's a reason it worked for the Swedish people at the time, and that they've retained elements of it fifty years later out of choice and because it works. This, for me, is progress, if you want to call it that. Thanks to Tony Judt and his infuriating little book for helping me along the path.



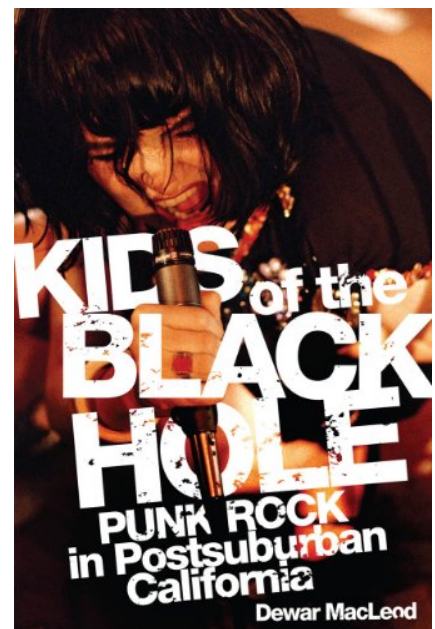
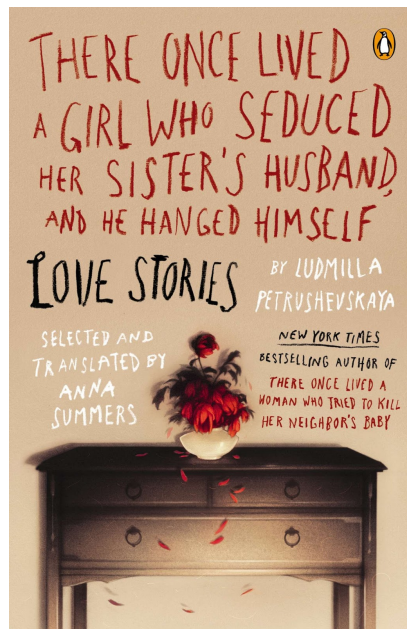
DONNA LETHAL – “Milk of Amnesia”

First, there's the name of the book: “Milk of Amnesia”, a malapropism I've always loved that's recently been applied to Propofol, the drug that killed Michael Jackson. Secondly, and more importantly, the book. *It's great!* Donna Lethal's 2011 memoir of her misbegotten childhood and teenage years in Lowell, MA has enough pathos and humor for several lifetimes, and it reminds me that I need to be scouring the small presses a little bit more in search of gems like this one. Her book came out on New Texture, and it's not simply her first book, it's her only (I'm told a new one is on the way). I powered through it in two sittings and was supremely bummed as it was wrapping up.

Memoir is a tricky game. Go too deep into navel-gazing detail, and you'll lose your audience in esoterica that matters greatly to you but won't resonate in the slightest with them. Skim too high, and you'll run the risk that your themes and stories aren't relatable or interesting enough. Donna Lethal hits dead-on, right where it counts, though woe be to you if you actually *relate* to her wacked-out family stories closely. Her 70s and early 80s youth in blue-collar Lowell provide many lessons in bad parenting, quite *simpatico* for me in that I'm of a similar age bracket, and familiar with hands-off style so prevalent in the 70s in my and all my friends' houses (TV-as-babysitter, go wherever you want as long as you're home by 6, etc.). Her parents took it to a more, uh, “elevated” place:

I prefer to call my parents' style with us laissez-faire because it sounds so much better than the other words people – like therapists and 12-step groups and social workers and guidance counselors and police – use. Besides, everything sounds better in French, doesn't it?

Her brother is a miscreant ne'er-do-well who beats her up, steals, lies and ends up in jail, with a brain-damaged girlfriend and another on the side. Her mother is purportedly a good Catholic, suffering under a heavy anvil of guilt and disgust, and drinking herself to sleep every night. Her father, whom it's clear she then and now adores and relates the most to, is an adulterous, thieving bookmaker who also served some time in the pokey. Yet he also shares a devil-may-care attitude to life's



travails with his daughter, and they have a similar retro-cultural aesthetic which bonds them fairly tightly. Circling their orbit are a variety of hustlers, drug abusers, religious goofballs and 70s archetypes whom we only recognize in the rear view mirror as being somewhat typical of their age – though grotesque and strange now.

Donna Lethal was one of those kids – you might have been one of them – who are desperately counting the weeks until they're able to move away from home and out of their hometowns. The only punk rocker in her school, she fled for Boston and a community of other misfits with whom she could not simply relate but commiserate and celebrate with. You get the sense that she successfully avoided many if not most of the excesses of her upbringing – the drugs and alcoholism especially, one horrific get-rid-of-my-brother's-cocaine-by-snorting-it-all story notwithstanding. Clear-eyed and grown up a little too early, she does a great job of relating those moments in childhood when you realize that the adults that surround you are not infallible, and that they may in fact be hoodwinking you across the board.

Her stories are told in overlapping chunks, sometimes in as little as a page and half, never exceeding 6 or 7 pages. She does it to great effect, and wastes very few words. Much as I loved Dan Fante's memoir romp through similar terrain, “**Fante: A Family's Legacy of Drinking, Writing & Surviving**”, this one's even better. Support the small press arts and the pre-ebook world and grab a paper copy of “Milk of Amnesia” over on the New Texture site or Amazon.com.

DEWEAR MACLEOD - “Kids of the Black Hole: Punk Rock In Postsuburban California”

A book about punk rock in late 70s/early 80s Southern California – absolutely *impossible* for me to resist. I did hold off for three years on Dewar MacLeod's “**Kids of the Black Hole**” because, at first flip, it appeared to be a dissertation-level sociological study of suburban evolution in Reagan-era Los Angeles, threaded with warmed-over punk rock history – a history I'm well-familiar with, given that LA punk & its offshoots circa '77-'83 is my favorite era of music anywhere, ever. My initial take on this was not very wide of the mark, I'm afraid,

though it was just interesting enough – and I mean *just* – for me to finish it all the way through. It's not that MacLeod's a poor writer *per se*, because he's not. He just writes like he's needing to turn this in as a paper to a professor who could *never understand* the paradigm-busting pleasures of Southern California punk rock, so the book is larded with all sorts of half-baked sociological theory in parts, when it's pretty clear that what MacLeod really wanted to do was give you a slam-bang killer overview of the music he loved and loves.

So what you get is a conventional start-to-finish chronological story of how LA punk developed out of the glitter/glam mid-70s, exploded in Hollywood, branched out to Orange County and the Valley, got violent and faster, and then fizzled out. What bugs me is how much MacLeod relies on second-hand source material, like old *Slash* Magazines and the oral histories already written about this scene, and adds so little of his own recollections and stories to it. The interviews he quotes aren't, by and large, interviews that *he* did, but rather interviews from **Flipside**, or **Slash**, or **NoMag**. I mean, that's a book that you and I can write tomorrow, assuming a decent-sized heft to our personal 70s/80s fanzine collections.

I'll admit, there was at least one new-to-me nugget in here that hadn't popped up elsewhere. My pal Jerry from Orange County has told me some pretty hilarious stories of a goony early 80s punk rock gang from the small OC suburb of La Mirada called the "La Mirada Punks" - the "LMPs". *They made this book! Hooray LMPs!* Chris D. and the Flesh Eaters, one of my all-time faves as well, also merit a couple of short paragraphs, which is a goddamn miracle considering how shut out they've been from previous texts. I truly wish there had been more insider dope and less haven't-I-read-that-somewhere-before moments.

That's not the worst of it, with all due respect to MacLeod. The book will start talking about hardcore punk pit fighting among bandana-wearing morons at TSOL and Adolescents shows, for instance, and then screech to a halt for an overview of gangs in America - "greasers" and Zoot Suit-wearers in the 50s and so on – to put it all in its sociological context. It's boring, it's unconvincing, and again, it reads like a college essay. Then the book gets back on track again with some cool Germs and Black Flag stories or discussions of the Great Punk Scare of 1981, before the cycle repeats itself. In no way would I recommend this book as your intro into LA punk history; for that, I'd follow a path through **"Hardcore California"**, **"We Got The Neutron Bomb"**, **"Violence Girl"** and the outstanding **"Lexicon Devil – The Fast Times and Short Life of Darby Crash"**. THEN, if you're not satiated – I'm still not, by any means – *then* you should find a used copy of this one, and approach with caution.

DAVID MARKEY & JORDAN SCHWARTZ - "We Got Power: Hardcore Punk Scenes From 1980s Southern California"
Now that the late 1970s Masque punk scene has been so fully mined in literary form by numerous books of photos and prose, I believe that posterity will now begin recognizing the outsized musical and cultural contributions made in Los Angeles by the immediate children of the late 70s scene: the hardcore punks, the paisley underground, the gothcore weirdos, the experimental free-music freaks and the SST crew – among many others. Now that I think about it, that documentation is already well underway, with Black Flag and Paisley Underground books and films about The Minutemen and so on

all having come out the past decade.

Hardcore punk left an indelible stamp on Southern California in the early 1980s. I continue to be supremely jealous of my friends who came of age in this location at a time when fast/hard/raging punk rock music was played on commercial radio every night at 8pm; when being a "punker" might expose you to some high school ridicule but also put you in a well-defined and exploding subculture of thousands of local kids; and where amazing records came out nearly every month. If you were a little more enterprising and clued in, you could tap into the over-21 scene and take a peek at what was going on with the Gun Club, Flesh Eaters, Dream Syndicate, Bangs, Green on Red camps, and so on. As Dave Markey and Jordan Schwartz's photo and essay book makes clear, there was considerable overlap between the prime movers of these scenes as well.

These two enterprising latchkey kids gathered up their cameras & skateboards and used their love of the exploding punk scene to begin documenting and living it in every way, shape and form. They started **WE GOT POWER** fanzine, a hand-written, somewhat silly magazine with photo collages that nonetheless captures the essence of the day exceptionally well, at least from the partyin' hardcore punk's perspective. Their definition of what was rad was expansive enough to include and celebrate The Minutemen, Red Cross, Saccharine Trust, 45 Grave and other heroes of mine, as well as a big reliance on and friendship with the bands who had their own gangs: Circle One and, later, Suicidal Tendencies. As Markey helpfully explains why they befriended many of the lunkheads who formed their own punk armies, *"You know that Beach Boys song 'I Get Around' - 'The bad guys know us, and they leave us alone'?"*

This book's a big cut above most punk rock photo books because it's at almost a snapshot level. By that I mean, rather than focus solely on bands posing or jumping in the air, there are a lot of candid photos of punk parties, graffitied locations, people lounging around at Oki-Dog and the like. The book provides a rather bounteous picture of what it was like to be a 16-year-old punk rocker in 1982 Southern California, lying to your parents about a sleepover at a friend's house so you could see Circle One, Sin 34 and RF7 at The Fleetwood on a Friday night. The best photos are ones of bored skate punks hanging out in front of drugstores, or trying to make a makeshift ramp, or getting wasted at some 3am party in Pico Rivera or Downey or Canoga Park.

Markey himself drummed in Sin 34, which is barely mentioned in the book despite numerous photos of the band hanging out and getting drunk. I always thought that We Got Power was Schwartz's thing and his alone, not realizing until now the contributions of his sister Jennifer (from the Love Dolls, and who overlapped with me at school in the 80s at UC-Santa Barbara), of Kim Pilkington (who sounds like a legendary piece of work) and the guy whose name escapes me now and whose dorm address was listed on the first two issues, but who's *persona non grata* in the book itself. Their collective looked to be a pretty tight unit, and they were obviously out and about at least 4 times per week, wherever the shows and the parties happened to be.

"We Got Power" is a collection of over a dozen essays by folks close to the beating core of the 'core. Henry Rollins, the

McDonald brothers of Red Cross/Kross, Mike Watt, Keith Morris, Janet Housdon, Chuck Dukowski and more. There are a few interesting and surprising takes on the scene that capture the excitement certain bands generated for a few months, like Jula Bell's essay on the wacky Nip Drivers. Most folks aren't too snotty or bitter about their teenage and early twenties involvement in this ephemeral scene, except for Jeff & Steve McDonald, who, rather than coming off as the funny and insightful pop culture punks they were in their youth, are actually still sort of angry about the motley collection of junkies, alcoholics and intolerant jocks whom they used to pal around with and who came to their shows. I suppose that, to me, hardcore is "funny" in many ways, when it's not still exhilarating and still a blast to listen to. Even if my tastes had greatly evolved from those I had at 16 – and I believe that they have – I'd be somewhat proud to have caught, ridden and helped to define this low-culture wave when it was at its peak & blowing suburban minds all over the Los Angeles basin. I was surprised to see them get the last word, and for it to be a dismissive one at that.

LUDMILLA PETRUSHEVSKAYA - "There Once Lived a Girl Who Seduced Her Sister's Husband, And He Hanged Himself"

This collection of short stories is rather dubiously and sardonically titled "Love Stories", but of course, they're really nothing of the sort. Soviet/Russian writer Ludmilla Petrushevskaya traffics in the sort of love in which children drift sadly apart from their parents, husbands and wives are continually philandering, alcohol poisons relationships and most everyone's grim, poor and barely holding it together. In other words, *great Russian literature!* I had a blast with this book. I read a review of it and instantly knew it was for me, and it didn't disappoint. It turns out Petrushevskaya's been writing for many years – she's now 70 – and her work was suppressed in the Soviet era; not because it was political, but because it was so dark, and because it showed a sad ordinariness in the broken lives and lost souls of the Communist system, the people who had to live within and under it for over 70 years. The stories collected here were written in spurts from the 1970s until just before the book's publication.

Petrushevskaya will typically, in these very short stories, quickly establish a central character – usually a girl or woman who lives in the tiny Moscow apartment blocks that the Soviets built *en masse* for the people. This girl or woman will often have conflict in her family; perhaps a loving mother (we learn in the translator's introduction that Petrushevskaya herself had a rotten childhood, redeemed by her mother's love) but not much else. Often her career is a dead end, and her romantic prospects are dismal; or, if she has a husband, he's a laggard, a liar or a drunk. When and if children come into the picture, it's not always a good thing, and it usually means that the father is either absent, or about to be.

One story that really grabbed me is called "Like Penelope", and strangely, it's one of the few semi-uplifting tales in the book. Our central character this time is Oksana, who lives with her mother Nina, who adores her, but "who is the only person who loved her". Through some interesting and strange family dynamics, she initially resists, then accepts a new dress her mom and grandmother-in-law have clumsily made her. Her confidence and beauty is transformed the moment she decides to embrace and wear it, at which point an estranged relative, her grandmother-in-law's grandson, bursts into the door during a drunken fight in the apartment downstairs that has just ended in murder. The relative



LUDMILLA PETRUSHEVSKAYA

is instantly captivated, and it's clear that Oksana will finally be loved by someone other than her mother. It's typical of Petrushevskaya to populate these stories with women like Nina, who want to do well and do right with their very limited means, only using their capacity for love in a place where there's not much of it to go around.

The picture one gets is probably one not much different from your conception of anonymous and desperate urban living on the margins of Russian society. It's a feminine take on the mundane day-to-day drabness of this sort of life, yet with life-changing moments like birth, death, marriage, divorce, heartbreak and familial inheritance that alter an individual's life dramatically; unfortunately, usually not for the better.

DAVID TALBOT – "Season of the Witch: Enchantment, Terror and Deliverance in the City of Love"

It was with much anticipation and excitement that I started former Salon.com editor David Talbot's 60s-70s-80s history of San Francisco, "**Season of the Witch**", and with much disappointment and disgust that I slammed it down thirteen chapters later. No, I did not finish the book. I'd never get those hours back, and alas, neither will I get back the four or so hours I invested in those 13 chapters. I believe that I can successfully and accurately review the book anyway, and hopefully talk you out of any inclination you might have toward reading it. To wit:

1. It has some of the most cringe-worthy, unimaginative writing I've seen in years.

I knew in the back of my head that Talbot, for all the initiative and gusto he showed in founding the once-excellent SALON back in the 1990s, was the web magazine's primary weak link when it came to actual journalism. Left-wing and emphatically so to a fault, his screeds about Bush this, 9/11 that (not to mention a bizarre Kennedy assassination obsession) made Michael Moore look like Tom Brokaw. Yet his bozo rock-n-roll shorthand in this book is even worse. He actually writes about how, in the Haight Ashbury, "*the idea of free medical service was blowin' in the wind*" (I wish I was

kidding), and he quotes numerous other hippie rock lyrics in the service of his horrifically purple prose. I just googled the SF Gate review of his book and they *respectfully* quoted a very representative line, about the murdered George Moscone and Harvey Milk:

"Both men gave their lives for this oasis of freedom," Talbot writes, "the city where no stranger was kept outside its golden gate."

That's a line the reviewer thought represented Talbot's writing style very well. I'm afraid the reviewer is correct.

2. Talbot has absolutely zero nuance, nor the ability to tell a complex tale.

In David Talbot's 1960s San Francisco, the world is strictly black and white. The hippies and the people that welcomed them were heroes; the city's Catholic "old guard" were intolerant, incompetent, racist, sexist pigs. Rock and roll, peace and love was all upside. Dissent against the warmed-over, likely half-baked, "Rolling Stone" popular history of liberated 60s San Francisco is nowhere to be found here. Everyone is cast into stereotypical roles: "socialites"; "free thinkers"; gruff, tough-talking cops; gritty newspapermen; earthy rock and rollers like Jerry Garcia; and so on. Talbot shows zero initiative in carving his own researched narrative through the tropes of the past, and instead relies on the sort of Summer of Love picture books I used to flip through as a dumb kid in the 1970s for *his* journalism. I know this book takes a "darker" turn later, after the part where I stopped reading, yet after such an awful

first third, the thought of how badly he'd butcher the People's Temple and Patty Hearst stories was just too much for me to stomach.

3. He believes every bit of BS this city's been telling itself since 1967.

I've lived in San Francisco since 1989, and I love it here. The self-congratulatory mythology this city soaks in, however, is and has forever been totally nauseating. Talbot has bought it all hook, line and sinker. He repeatedly waxes rhapsodic about "the fog rolling across the hills" and about San Francisco's "liberated, anything-goes spirit", except he usually uses some trite rock lyric or metaphor to write it even worse than I just did. Anyway, who actually calls this place "the city of love"? No one except for stoned hippie journalists in 1967 did – no one. The last straw for me was Talbot's misty-eyed chapter on San Francisco Chronicle columnist Herb Caen, "swinging with the hepcats at Tosca", nursing a highball, rapping with Ferlinghetti, stooping down to understand the hippies, wearing his fedora to jazz clubs blah blah blah. I couldn't believe the shorthand and the shortcuts this guy took in the service of telling what could have been an incredible tale. The popular thumbnail view of everything that's happened here, and everyone who did it, just happens to be Talbot's lazy method of describing it as well.

All my worst fears about a clunker of a book were realized in its first third, and then some. I'm writing this as a warning to any potential readers, so that you may be dissuaded from investing four hours of your own life into this complete exercise in futility.

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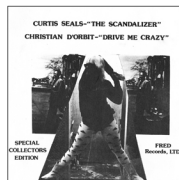
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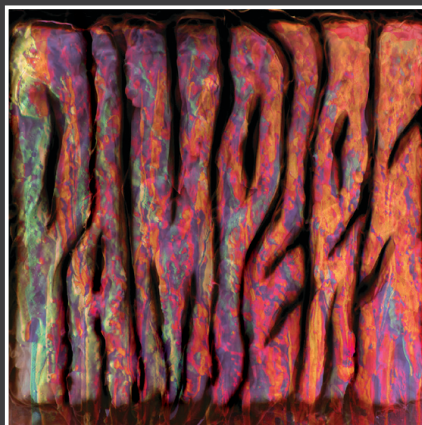
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